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The Influence of External Factors in the Overrepresentation of African American Males in Minnesota Special Education Programs

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**The Influence of External Factors in
the Overrepresentation of African American Males
in Minnesota Special Education Programs**

Lynn Karen Lewis

**Submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirement for the degree of
Master of Social Work**

**AUGSBURG COLLEGE
MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA**

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**MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK
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MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA**

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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for the Master of Social Work Degree.

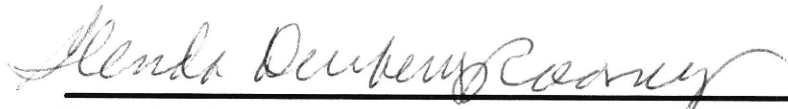
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This thesis is dedicated to God, for without Him

I could do nothing,

my husband for his support and patience,

my children for their unconditional love,

and Mama and Daddy for teaching me to dream.

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Abstract

Nationally African American males are disproportionately represented in special education programs. The city of Minneapolis closely mirrors the national trend in this regard. According to the Minneapolis Board of Education black males represent 40 percent of the enrollees in the learning disability, and educational behavior disorder classrooms, even though they are only 21 percent of the total school population. Research in this area is important because if black males are inappropriately assessed for special education placements, it may lead to the following: 1) *academic and social segregation from their mainstream peers; 2) inappropriate labeling and education of African American males; and the perpetuation of life choice inequality and limitation of vocational opportunity.* In order to assess the perceived causes and possible solutions to this concern interviews were conducted involving educational professionals, social workers, and parents who are/were involved with the Minnesota public school system. A guided interview format was used and the themes investigated were the perceptions of the influences of race, parenting, teacher expectation, and gender on the referrals of African American males to special education. The participants share their evaluations of the current system, and suggestions for future improvements. The findings of the literature review and the qualitative research revealed the following: 1) In most instances once African American boys are labeled EBD they are placed in a closed and segregated system until they drop-out or graduate, 2) There are more factors involved in labeling an African American boy EBD besides his observable behaviors 3) African American parents and teachers often have behaviors that place black boys at risk for special education placement.

*What happens to a dream deferred?
 Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun?
 Or fester like a sore and then run?
 Does it stink like rotten meat?
 Or crust and sugar over Like a syrupy sweet?
 Maybe it just sags Like a heavy load.
 Or does it explode?
 —Langston Hughes*

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

In Langston Hughes poem “A Dream Deferred” he compares a dream not actualized to a “raisin in the sun” (Hughes, 1959). The picture of a raisin slowly drying in the sun mirrors the educational experiences of many African American males. Their academic encounters perpetuates the obliteration of hopes and dreams (Wilson 1994, Kozcol 1991, Davis & Jordon 1994) According to Fremon & Hamilton (1997) there is a larger percentage of African American boys enrolled in special education programs than the total represented in the school population nationally. The professional literature, census data, and the reports from the Minnesota board of education document the overrepresentation of African American males in special education programs (see for example Coles 1987, Fremon & Hamilton 1997, Ryan 1992, and et al) (see Appendices 1 and 2).

There are a myriad of reasons for this occurrence, from physical reasons to racism, depending on the researcher and the individual involved. Some African American males, like their Caucasian peers, are placed in segregated special education programs because of physical and mental disabilities. However, in situations where children are placed in special education because of their gender or race, (biases of the teacher), we are faced with issues of discrimination, de facto or even de jure.

There are some who feel that the prevailing segregation of African Americans in public school settings has more to do with their low socio-economic standing than race or other visual differences (Wilson, 1978, 1987). However Fremon and Hamilton (1997), Coles (1987), and Wilson & Banks (1994) disagree with Wilson. Their research points to the numerical disparity African American males face in comparison to their white counterparts within the educational system. In their opinion, this phenomenon can only be deeply rooted in racial and gender issues. For instance, Coles cites a study conducted in Texas on special education and race “....found that the largest numbers of youngsters in Learning Disabled (LD) classes were white. This was not surprising since there were more whites than blacks or Mexican Americans in the schools. However, proportionally, blacks were overrepresented in LD classes” (Coles, 1987, p.205). “The African American male is disproportionately labeled mentally retarded and placed in special education classes and (is more often) the recipient of corporal punishment than their European American counterparts” (Wilson and Banks, 1994, p. 97). Some authors also indicate that the preeminence of the overrepresentation phenomenon is just as much an issue for upper income blacks as it is for the poor. Santrock (1995) notes that middle-class ethnic minority youth still encounter much of the prejudice, discrimination, and bias associated with being a member of a minority group. Economic advantage does not entirely enable them to escape their racial status.

Special education legislation has made public school education accessible to many who might otherwise be ignored. However, the stigma of being perceived as having a disability is still present in modern society, and in its microcosm, the classroom. Lipsky & Gartner (1989) believe that within the special education setting the child is

considered to be “impaired”, instruction in such settings are deficit focused, and professional personnel are often narrowly trained and certified to work only with specific disabilities. Attention to larger societal issues, such as racism, is often considered too political and not the business of educational institutions. According to Lipsky & Gartner (1989) even the child’s parents are viewed as disabled. Students associated with special education and remedial programs have high dropout rates, limited learning for those who complete school, and poor preparation for subsequent education or employment (Lipsky & Gartner, 1989).

This thesis is not an attempt to prove that all African American boys placed in special education programs are erroneously assessed, nor does it attempt to address the growing concern that segregated special education programs are inherently flawed systems for all students. Neither is it this author’s contention that all black male students in every learning environment suffer these biases. Every problem is not of the schools’ making. Fortunate students receive enough love, encouragement, and support at school and at home, or in their communities but many do not (Fremon & Hamilton, 1997). This analysis is focused on black males misdiagnosed for learning disabilities, and behavioral disorders, as well as individuals who may have special needs, but for whom special education is not appropriate, and for whom that would not have been “the placement” of choice for other children. Among a growing group of advocates and researchers there is agreement with a National Academy of Sciences report published a decade ago that there is not a substantial educational difference to distinguish among these groups of students or to fashion different instructional strategies (Heller, Holzman, & Messick, 1982).

Research in this area is important because African American males inappropriately assessed for behavioral disorders and learning disabilities in many instances, face the following consequences:

- *Academic and social segregation from their mainstream peers (Winzer, 1993; Weiss, 1988; Reynolds 1995 and et al)*
- *The inappropriate labeling and education of African American males (Gouldner, 1978)*
- *The perpetuation of life choice inequality and limitations (Wilson, 1994)*

This study encompasses males assessed for chronic behavioral problems and non organic learning disabilities. The thesis data is based on the Minneapolis school district as well as national public school information. The primary research component of this paper will consist of an exhaustive review of existing literature on this topic including credible journal articles, books, magazine, internet data, published dissertations, and thesis.

The secondary research component were qualitative interviews with parents, teachers, social workers, and a school psychologist. These individuals were selected to participate in this study because of their involvement with the Minnesota public school system and African American boys. The interview instrument was designed to get their perceptions of the current paradigm that exists between special education and African American boys.

A qualitative interview approach was selected because it served as a vehicle to obtain insights, the emotions of a group of individuals deemed as influential members of the school system.

CHAPTER 2

Review of the Literature

Extent of the Problem

The author has identified 3 areas that reflect the extent of the problem they are:

- 1. Segregation**
- 2. Tracking and labeling**
- 3. Inequality of life choices**

More than twice as many blacks as whites are classified as mentally retarded (US News and World Report, 1994). For every 100 students classified as emotionally impaired, 50 were African American males while 9 were Caucasian females (Wang, Reynolds, and Walberg, 1995). According to the Minneapolis Board of Education 1996-97 statistical report on special education participants, African American males represent 40 percent of the enrollees in the Learning Disabled (LD), Emotional Behavioral Disorders (EBD), and Mild Mental Handicap (MMH) categories, even though they are only 21 percent of the total school. Nationwide, black children are three times as likely as white children to be placed in classes for the mentally retarded but only half as likely to be placed in classes for the gifted (Kozol, 1991). "The vision of increasingly large numbers of the nation's population being labeled "disabled" is clearly counter-intuitive and suggests the need for careful consideration of alternative hypotheses to explain the high rates of special education placement" (Harry, 1994, p.5).

Santrock (1995), Kunjufu (1985), Ogbu, and et al (1986) argue that testing used for school assessments is culturally biased and results in African American children doing poorly on such tests. Jenkins (1990) feels that the difference between black and

European male culture is not the reason for the poor academic performance of many black children. He feels that the school setting is incompatible to the black child and the black community. The current educational system in America is "... an environment that is structured on a middle class mode, with rewards and punishments based upon middle class values" (Jenkins, 1990, p.9).

Jensen (1969) disagrees with Jenkins in regard to the low academic performance of many African American children on IQ tests scores, arguing that environment and culture play a minimal role in intelligence and that intelligence is primarily an inherited trait. To show that genetic factors are more important than environmental factors, Jensen compared the IQ scores of identical twins reared together with those of twins reared apart. He found that there was a small difference of .11 between the scores of the two groups. Thus, if environmental influences were more important than genetic influences, the siblings reared apart who experienced different environments, should have IQs much further apart. Conversely Santrock (1995) argues that IQ tests tap only a narrow range of intelligence and that everyday problem solving, work, and social adaptability, are important aspects of intelligence not measured by traditional intelligence tests such as those used in Jensen's research.

Reschly (1988) asserts that identical treatment of different children constitutes equitable treatment and should be the defining "litmus test" for the fairness of placements. For example he states,

...whether minority and white students with the same academic or behavioral problems are treated differently in the placement process... If equal treatment can be demonstrated and the programs are effective, then minority disproportionate

representation, in our view, can be defended on legal and ethical grounds (Reschly, 1988, p. 46).

Harry (1994) suggests that while the Reschly (1988) position appears to be a sound approach the question of fairness must still be addressed in terms of whether identical treatment of different children necessarily constitutes equitable treatment. “For example, if a Black and a White child are each given the IQ test, and the IQ test is biased in favor of the language, culture, or life experience of the White child, then using the same instrument is not equitable” (Harry, 1994, p. 11). Ogbu (1986) agrees with Harry that the cognitive abilities of African American children are not measured in a way that is relevant to their environment. For instance he notes that many African American children are street smart and possess a myriad of life skills that are disregarded by the public school system. The assessment activities under the traditional system focused primarily on internal, nonobservable traits of the child, such as intelligence, which are difficult to assess and impossible to alter through interventions. Ogbu further states that the atmosphere in the public school system does not provide an academically motivating environment for African American students. He feels that school relations with black students are riddled with suspicion and conflict making it difficult for students to concentrate on doing well on placement tests (Ogbu, 1986). The use of IQ testing as a means of measuring intelligence has problems in relation to fairness to ethnic and racial minority children (Reschly 1988).

Another area deemed a problem with the traditional special education system that there is no relationship between standardized tests and interventions (Reschly & Starkweather, 1997). Nor could the test results be used to monitor the progress of the

child who received special education programming. The standardized tests were seen as helpful for eligibility determination, with little relevance to designing, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating interventions (Reschley & Starkweather, 1997).

Segregation

Often children in special education programs are exposed to different literacy curricula. As the children move from location to location in the school to participate in special instructional programs they lose potentially valuable instructional time in the transitions. Academic segregation occurs because students involved in special education programs learn lower task level skills while their peers are in higher level classes (Reynolds, 1995).

A 1994 National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) study found that the high proportion of minority student referrals to special education classes may amount to a kind of “within school” segregation. Even though special education programs do provide some children with an appropriate education, misclassifying students may strip them of their civil rights by denying them access to a core curriculum (Fremon & Hamilton 1997).

The segregation of minority children in special education programs during the elementary years occurs as well in the middle and high school years. Weis (1988) says that a pattern of segregation continues into the senior high school years. Blacks and other minorities are frequently enrolled in vocational and general programs (non academic track), while whites participate in college preparatory courses. However a question that must be addressed is what if children aren’t cognitively capable of doing the work? In response to this question Coles (1987) found that even though there have been

some children helped through special education placement follow-up studies, have shown that the majority of students placed do not improve academically. They fall progressively behind their peers in basic academic subjects. He asserts that the special education route for most students leads exactly to the same place where they began — educational failure.

African American males are often placed in special education classrooms for behaviors that the dominant culture may deem as deviant from established norms but which are not atypical in the black community (Nixon and Taylor, 1996). African American males have frequently developed interpersonal skills which are not accepted by the school and this perceived inability to conform to expected social standards may result in unacceptable social behavior in school towards peers and adults (Nixon and Taylor, 1996). The research findings by Kunjufu (1985), Weis (1988), Santrock (1995), and Nixon and Taylor (1996) support the concept that unacceptable social behaviors are directly associated with deprived cultural environments. Fremon and Hamilton (1997) feel that very often African American children who are failing and have special needs are misdiagnosed as having behavior problems. Putting them in special education is a way of getting rid of them.

Many of the special education placements claim to be able to improve the child's social skills, however when children are placed in special education programs with others who have similar academic problems, behaviors concerns, and home backgrounds, they receive no achievement oriented role modeling from students who are doing well in the regular classroom settings.

Davis & Jordan (1994) also conclude that black male students are placed in remedial classes or retained in a grade because their performance is less than where it should be, or at least because it lags behind that of their peers. Many black males continue to fall behind academically and often give up altogether by dropping out of school.

Tracking And Labeling

The tracking and labeling aspect of special education placements for African American males very often traps them in a closed system for their entire academic career. Tracking is the sorting of students into different educational programs on the basis of real or perceived need (Henslin, 1995). Sigmon (1990) says that assessment in relation to African American children has to do with inconsistent biased interpretation, and labeling. Although there are specific yet flexible federal definitions for the various categories, disability state and local educational agencies continue to experience substantial difficulty in formulating operational definitions for any one of the categories. The categories currently in place give theoretical definitions of disabilities but, provide little consideration for the social, cultural, and economic components associated with assessments (Sigmon. 1990).

According to Henslin (1995) tracking, labeling, and referring certain groups into lower level school programs puts the schools in a “gate keeping” position because they determine who is eligible for middle class and who goes lower. According to Denmoyer and Kos (1993) students’ responses to special classroom placements and being held back because of decisions based on testing suggest that inappropriate assessments can socially

construct at-risk students. Kozcol (1991) is convinced that the racial patterns that occur as a result of being locked into bottom-level tracking injure a child's self esteem.

In observations made by Gouldner (1978) once a student is put in an educational track, they almost always remain there. A child categorized as slow is kept to pace with a perceived like group. No matter how well the child performed in that group or what potential he/she may have had for keeping up with the children in higher functioning groups they were unable to break out of the closed system. Henslin (1995) and Kunjufu (1985) support this stance. They believe that students who complete higher track courses go on to college while those on lower track courses are more likely to go to work after high school or attend a community college.

Inequality Of Life Choices

Poor educational experiences often serve as antecedents to many of the social and economic problems students face as adults. Therefore the inequities in schooling experiences have potentially broad consequences for students' future educational attainment, employment, and family relations (Davis & Jordan, 1994). Children locked into bottom-level tracking in conjunction with poverty receive a message of racial isolation. They have in place an almost perfect instrument to guarantee that we will need more handcuffs and more prisons Kozcol (1991).

History of Special Education Legislation

The 1950's saw an accelerated trend toward the recognition of the importance of disabled pupils and their right to suitable educational facilities. Enrollments increased in special education programs, preparation of personnel expanded, and state financial commitment grew (Winzer, 1993).

According to Hume (1987) special education legislation received momentum from the 1954 case, *Brown v. Board of Edu., 347 U.S. 483 (1954)*. In this case regarding racial desegregation of public schools the Supreme Court ruled that the opportunity of an education, where the state has undertaken to provide it, is a right that must be made available to all on equal terms

According to Winzer (1993) the formation of permanent segregated classes in the public schools can be traced back to 1910. He also notes that by 1931 special education was accepted in several urban school systems even though the majority of potential clients did not receive services.

Although, students with disabilities who were not experiencing the isolation of institutional settings they were placed in segregated classrooms that led to another kind of isolation (Coveny and Winzer, 1993). According to Coveny and Winzer (1993) children struggling with different conditions were lumped together, and no real effort was made to teach them. Special education classrooms were used as a means of removing undesirable children from regular classrooms even if they were not disabled. Special classes were also stigmatized. Regular students looked upon the children with disabilities as persons to be avoided (Coveny and Winzer, 1993).

By the 1970's the improvements made to the system were a stark contrast to the state of special education during previous decades. However, the system was still segregated, exclusionary, and legislation was inconsistent between the states (Winzer, 1993).

There was a growing concern as to the appropriateness of programs. For instance, a disproportionate number of minority children were placed in segregated classes, especially those for the mentally retarded. There was the suspicion that minority - group pupils were slotted into such programs more for the convenience of educators than for the good of the children (Winzer, 1993). According to Harry (1994) litigation in the 1960's and 70's reflected increasing concern with discriminatory educational practice. For instance *Johnson v the San Francisco Unified School District, 500 F. 2d 349 (9th Cir., 1974)* charged that special education classes were being used to cover racial segregation. In the case of *Larry P. et al., v Wilson Riles et al., C-71-2270 RFP, District Court of Northern California (1979)* the San Francisco school district was accused of discrimination against five African American children who had been placed in classes for "educably mentally retarded (EMR)" (Prasse & Reschly, 1986).

According to Harry (1994) the results of the *Larry P.* litigation revealed that IQ tests were culturally biased and had not been validated for the purposes for which they were being used, i.e., placement of Black children in EMR classes. The testing process in California revealed "unlawful segregative intent". Judge Peckham banned IQ testing as an assessment tool for special education placement. He also ordered the state to monitor

and eliminate the overrepresentation of Black students in classes for the Educably Mentally Retarded

The Objectives of Public Law 94-142/The Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

Four years before the Education for All Handicapped Children Act in 1975 (which was later changed to the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)), only seven states had mandatory legislation in all categories of exceptionality while twenty-six others had some form of mandatory provisions. The guidelines and standards for special education policy varied between states (Thomas and Russo, 1995).

According to Winzer (1993), Blenk and Fine (1995) during the 1970's society's stance on segregation and institutionalization for individuals with disabilities changed dramatically. Philosophies of "mainstreaming" and "normalization" became popular. Blenk and Fine (1995) define mainstreaming as a process by which a child with special needs is invited to participate (with supports as needed) in one or more components of a typical school day, i.e., gym, lunch, or selected academic subjects. According to Wolfensberger normalization occurs when exceptional individuals live with members of the cultural group in a normal setting within the community, and when they have access to all the privileges and services that are available to others (Winzer, 1993).

Hume (1987) noted that by 1975 most states had laws which required local school districts to admit and provide some degree of education for all resident children, regardless of their disability. Public Law 94-142 (The Individuals with Disabilities

Education Act) IDEA was signed into law by President Gerald Ford in 1975, and legalized public school access to children with disabilities.

According to Winzer (1993) the objectives of Public Law 94-142 of 1975 were as follows:

- 1) To remedy the failure of some schools to provide free and appropriate education for disabled students
- 2) To bring the concept of special education in line with the principles of normalization and the least restrictive environment
- 3) To eliminate the practice of excluding students with physical or emotional handicaps from public school settings
- 4) To give parents the right of due process and confidentiality
- 5) To mandate school boards to provide a range of educational services, and individual education plan for every exceptional student.

The Impact of Societal Contexts on Special Education Placements

Race and Gender

A 1990 study included more than 105,000 students in Maryland's Prince George County, African American males made up nearly 65 percent of the enrollment. The study revealed that black male pupils performed comparably to boys and girls of all races on first and second grade standardized math and reading tests. However, by the fourth grade African American boys had lower scores than all of the other groups (Fremon & Hamilton, 1997).

It might be argued that the drop off for African American boys can be attributed to the academic environmental change that occurs in the third grade. Classrooms become more structured at this time and students are expected to sit still and listen for long periods of time. Some researchers have suggested that male students have higher energy levels. According to Fremon & Hamilton (1997) a teacher's negative reaction to these high energy levels, combined with racist tendencies may result in viewing the child as an undesirable element in the classroom. The same kind of behavior that is usually dismissed when observed in white kids will be taken as more serious and chronic in black males.

Foster (1986) has argued that students who are often labeled by teachers as emotionally disturbed, socially maladjusted, learning disabled, or retarded were just tough street corner black or other minority youngsters. He stresses the importance of teachers understanding lower class Black male street corner behavior. Kunjufu (1990)

supports Foster in this stance feels that the relationship between African American male students and white female teachers tends to be a very tenuous, and yet it predominates, and is going to increase as the number of African American teachers decline. It is obvious that violence and other crimes involving injurious behaviors projected toward self/others should not be tolerated. However, disciplinary criteria should be consistently administered. For instance, Fremont & Hamilton (1997), in their analysis of the Minneapolis school district, discovered that 43 percent of all the children suspended during the period of 1995-96, were African American males as opposed to 14 percent by white males. More black boys were suspended in this city for displaying a lack of cooperation and disrespect as opposed to profanity and violence related issues than any of the group. According to Fremon & Hamilton (1997), Luis Ortega, a school administrator in Minneapolis, stated that many teachers don't understand the language of poverty, the ways inner city African American children communicate, so they have a tendency to take it as disrespect. "Disrespect is something you don't want to tolerate but we adults have a lot of work to do in the area of listening to young people"(Fremon & Hamilton, 1997, p.123).

Wilson (1978, 1987) expresses the view that social class is more important than race in determining the life chances of African Americans. He says that civil rights legislation created career opportunities for some blacks to move into the ranks of the middle class while others were left in lower economic situations. Those who have acquired middle class status are able to live in good housing, in relatively crime free neighborhoods, and their children are able to attend good schools. The African American middle class, according to Wilson, has very little in common with blacks who remain

poor. However, Henslin (1995) disagrees with Wilson's position which he believes omits the vital element of discrimination that affects both groups. According to Fremon and Hamilton (1997) just because blacks attend suburban schools doesn't mean that they are receiving the same education as their white peers. African American children in suburban schools, as opposed to those in inner-city schools, have to deal with the added element of being the true minority in their environment. The black children attending suburban schools also deal with issues of unjust classroom ranking and placement just as children from urban schools do. According to the article "*Separate But Unequal*" (as cited by Schmittroth, L., 1993) analysis of special education in 39 states indicates that black students are overrepresented in special education programs, especially when they are students in predominately white school districts.

When reviewing the academic achievements of African Americans in comparison to Hispanics, Asians and other minority groups there are some major distinctions that should be taken in to account. Ogbu (1978; 1987) states in his theory of psycho-social development among minority peoples that America has indigenous and immigrant minority groups. Indigenous minority groups are native to a country, such as African Americans or Native Americans, as well as those whose history in the country is one of political domination, such as Chicanos or Puerto Ricans. He views immigrant minorities as those who have come to the country voluntarily.

According to Ogbu (1978; 1987) immigrant minorities experience cultural discontinuities with their host country, such as language, or nonverbal rather than verbal learning styles. Nevertheless, immigrants seem to approach the host country from a

frame of reference which allows them to use the local social hierarchy to reach their goals, rather than internalizing the position of low caste to which they are relegated.

Ogbu (1974) argues that indigenous minority groups, however, find themselves in a position of subjugation in their own society. They tend to react to institutional and social inequities by developing “secondary cultural discontinuities” which work against their success. Fordham (1988) gives an example of Ogbu’s theory on “secondary cultural discontinuity” observing that while successful black youth used a “raceless persona” in order to succeed in school, the majority of black youth developed an “oppositional social identity” by emphasizing black linguistic or behavioral styles that were not valued by the school.

Ogbu (1987) reported that West Indians have been more successful in the US where they are immigrants, than they have been in Britain where they held the status of colonial peoples; he also reported a higher achievement by Asian minority groups of low caste in their own countries, but are much more successful when they emigrate to the US.

Harry (1994) believes that criticisms of Ogbu’s theory relate mainly to the fact that there are many disconfirming examples of individuals who do well, and also that there is a great deal of overlap between immigrant and indigenous groups, so that many groups fall between the cracks of the theory. However, Harry notes that as a general theory Ogbu’s framework has been well received.

The Teacher's Role

Decreasing Number Of Black Teachers

Prior to the 1954 Brown vs. board of education ruling which ushered in the desegregation of schools in the United States, black schools were controlled by black administrators. According to Irvine (1990) the desegregation decision dictated that white school boards and superintendents be in control of critical personnel decisions, such as hiring, firing, and transferring in previously all black schools. During the segregation era the black schools represented and took uniquely stylized characteristics reflective of its members-patterns of communication, cultural preferences, and normatively diffused modes of behavior. Black educators labored to help students to realize their achievement goals. In this role both principals and teachers were profound, extensions of the interests of the black community. However, Davis & Jordan (1994) challenge Irvine in regard, to relevance of black teacher involvement. They indicate that there is limited research that supports the effectiveness and the educational outcomes of black male teachers working with black male students.

Low Teacher Expectation

Teacher expectations for African American males are often very low. A teacher's opinion of a student's capabilities plays an important role in class assessments (Santrock, 1995). Supporting this stance Irvine (1990) iterates that early in the school year teachers form differential expectations for student performance. Consistent with these incongruent expectations, teachers behave differently toward different students. This ambiguous behavior communicates to each student something about how he is expected

to behave in the classroom and perform academic tasks. According to Irvine (1990) ultimately, the expectations have an impact on student achievement and other outcomes, in that indicating that teacher expectations can function as self-fulfilling prophecies.

According to Santrock (1995) teachers have lower expectations of children from lower class backgrounds. A teacher who knows a child comes from a low income family may spend less time trying to help the child solve a problem and may anticipate the child will be a trouble maker. Santrock (1995) believes that a teacher's background can affect their expectations of a student. Teachers from middle class backgrounds may assess lower income children's behaviors as falling short of middle class standards. While teachers from lower class backgrounds may assess the same children as behaving in a manner that is adaptive to their environment. Research conducted by Irvine (1990) suggests that teacher's expectations of black males' achievement are more often influenced by their stereotypes of black males as potential disrupters than by their academic ability. Because schools are loosely coupled systems and teachers frequently operate autonomously and independently, a teacher's impact on the lives of students is perhaps greater than one might imagine. A research study conducted by Davis & Jordan (1994) produced findings that are positively correlated with those of Irvine. They found that there are teachers who assign more homework and demand greater effort and performance from their black male students but also give them higher grades. This was generally related to higher teacher expectation. The data suggests that these teachers may believe that the students are capable of doing the work and deserve grades that are commensurate with work performance. However, lower grading teachers either lack confidence in the students, have lower expectations of them or both. They assign little

homework because they believe their black male students will not or can't complete it. They therefore issue lower grades because they feel the student deserves them or is not capable of earning higher grades.

Kunjufu (1990) indicates that tracking begins the 8th day of kindergarten. At this point teachers have only subjective perceptions of children i.e., parental registration forms, children's dress, the way they smell, do they speak "black English", the paternal presence in the home, and the family income level. Children that do not meet the teacher's expectations receive lower level expectations.

Davis & Jordan (1994) found that the way a teacher handles discipline in the classroom also plays a part in the low academic standing of African American males. Their findings suggest that the time teachers spend handling disciplinary problems is time taken away from instruction; Black male achievement suffers as a result

Parental Roles

In this author's opinion, the parental role influence in the overrepresentation of African American males is undeniable. According to Clark (1986), parents contribute to the problem in a myriad of ways. For instance the frameworks that shapes the platform for the academic failure of many African American males in public school includes their parent. Very often mothers and fathers are so absorbed with the daily stressors of survival that school achievement is not viewed as an immediate concern. According to Kunjufu (1990) the parents are a product of the school system and see no way out of the negative fate that awaits their children. Some are resigned to their low ranking in society.

The tracking and ranking of children begins with the eighth day of kindergarten. Parents should make a conscious effort to expose their children to the kinds of experiences their children will be expected to master beginning with kindergarten (Kunjufu, 1990). Clark (1983), and Santrock (1995) agree that African American children can overcome poverty, institutional racism when parents provide the following for their children:

- Standards for moral and "good behavior"
- Positions and role boundaries in the home
- Patterns for consistent, regularly performed, learning rituals
- Parental Control and support

Studies conducted by Zimmerman, Salem, and Maton (1995) on African American adolescent males agree with Clark (1983), and Kunjufu (1990) indicate that

black males raised in single parent homes headed by females can overcome the pitfalls of delinquency and academic failure through consistent positive parenting in conjunction with familial and community supports.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

Theoretical Framework

The issue addressed in this paper is the disproportionate number of African American males in special education systems and how the varying societal constructs of gender, race, teachers, and parents perpetuate the problem. Since there are many fiery darts fueling this dilemma the extinguishers must be applied to the appropriate sources. This analysis' focus is on the contributions gender, racism, parents and teachers give to the overrepresentation of African American males in special education systems.

Ecological systems theory perspective was used to show how the various components of the problem work together to strengthen the barriers and stressors imposed upon African American male children. Ecological systems theory posits that individuals are engaged in constant transactions with other human beings and with other systems in the environment and these various persons and systems reciprocally influence each other. According to Hepworth and Larsen (1993) an advantage of the ecological systems model is that it is so broad in scope that typical human problems like educational difficulties and conflicts with law enforcement can be subsumed under this model, enabling researchers to analyze complex variables involved in such problems. From the ecological systems perspective it is clear that the satisfaction of human needs and mastery of developmental tasks require the availability of adequate resources in the environment and positive transactions between persons and their environments. For instance the effective learning by a student requires adequate schools, competent teachers, parental support, adequate

perception, and intellectual ability, motivation to learn and positive relationships between teachers and students (Hepworth & Larsen, 1993). This approach will provide a high rung to view the contributions policy, and societal roles manifest in the dilemma of the overrepresentation of African American males in special education systems.

Research Strategy

The research component of this thesis involved qualitative interviews with 4 African American parents, 2 White teachers, 2 African American teachers, 3 African American school social workers, 1 White school psychologist and 1 white social worker. All of the participants are currently or were previously involved with the Minnesota public school systems.

The parents represented in the study are 2 African American married couples. Both couples have children currently attending Minnesota public school or have graduated. One of the 4 parents is a retired school teacher from the Minneapolis public school district. Her husband is a retire professional currently tutoring in an elementary school in Minneapolis. They have 4 children all of which have graduated from the Minneapolis public school system. This couple was selected because of their experience as parents and educators within the school system.

The second couple has 1 child that has graduated from the Minnesota public school system and 2 currently attending . They were selected because they have expressed vocally and through their actions their passion for avoiding special education for their children.

The teacher participants are composed of 2 White American special education teachers (both females) who currently work in the Eden Prairie school district. There are

Social Worker participants include 3 African American social workers (1 male and 2 females) all of which work for the Minneapolis school district; and a White American social worker from the Eden Prairie school district.

The Psychologist is a White American female currently working in the Minneapolis school district.

The purpose of using a qualitative methodology is to share the experiences of people involved in the Minneapolis public school system. The interviewing technique used was the ***Interview Guide*** approach. According to Patton (1987) the Interview Guide Approach involves using a list of questions or issues that are to be explored during the interview. A guide is designed to ensure that consistent information is derived from a variety of people on the same subject. The guide serves as a checklist to ensure that the essential topics are explored.

Strengths

Using the Interview Guide approach the interviewer is free to build a conversation within a particular subject area and to word questions spontaneously. They are also able to establish a conversational style. All of this is done while focusing on a particular predetermined subject.

The strengths of using the Interview Guide Approach is that it enables the researcher to spontaneously structure the most effective way to use the limited time available in an interview. "The interview guide helps make interviewing different people more systematic and comprehensive by delimiting the issues to be discussed in the interview.... A guide keeps the interaction focused, but allows individual perspectives

and experiences to emerge” (Patton, 1987, p. 111). He also indicates that another strength of this approach is that data collection is systematic for each person interviewed. Interviews are conversational and situational.

Weaknesses

The disadvantage of this style according to Patton (1987) is that important topics may be omitted. The interview flexibility in sequencing and wording questions may result in extremely diverse responses which make it difficult to compare the responses.

The interview guide developed for this project was designed to get the interviewee to share their personal ideologies and perceptions regarding the reason for the disproportionate number of African American boys in special education. The themes explored in the interview guide included the influence of race, gender, parental role, and teacher’s role as contributors to the problem. All participants were asked similar questions in relation to the influence of race, gender, parental involvement, and teacher expectation to the disproportionate representation of African American boys in special education programs. They were also asked to provide recommendations for the current system. (See interview guide in Appendix 2)

This group is not deemed to be representative of all parents and school professionals involved in the lives of African American boys. However, the insights they provided add another dimension of comparison to the previously stated quantitative data and literature findings in this paper. This stance is in accordance with Rubin & Babbie (1997) who assert that qualitative interviews in comparison to surveys and experiments tend to tap more depth of meaning but have less reliability. Patton (1987) in agreement

with Rubin & Babbie (1997) states that qualitative data derives detailed information through direct quotation and description of program situations, events people, interactions, and observed behavior. The limitations of this research involve issues surrounding reliability and generalizability. Both of these concerns are not uncommon to the philosophical arguments against the abstract and subjective data that qualitative research produces.

The conclusions drawn from qualitative research are often regarded as suggestive rather than definitive. According to Patton (1987) one of the questions raised when using a qualitative methodology is *To what extent is a human report and observation reliable?* Reliability is a limitation in relation to this project because there is always the possibility that participants might have responded differently if a different investigator posed the questions.

Generalizability is also a limitation of this study due to the personal nature of the interviews and measurements used in this research may not be replicated by another investigator. Another common concern about qualitative methods is the small sample size involved (such as the one used in this study) and the impossibility of generalizing research findings (Patton, 1987).

Chapter 4

Discussion and Findings

The data derived from the interviews conducted with parents, teachers, social workers, and a psychologist were compared to determine their perceptions in relation to the following:

- ◆ **Participant perception of special education and the disproportionate number of African American boys referred for behavioral issues**
- ◆ **Participant perception of racial influence**
- ◆ **Participant perception of parenting influence**
- ◆ **Participant perception of gender influence**
- ◆ **Participant perception of teacher expectation influence**
- ◆ **Participant perception of recommendations to resolve the issue**

The contrasts and similarities of the answers were viewed across racial, discipline lines. According to Santrock (1995) and et al there may be some distinctions in how white and black educational professionals view this topic. One of the focal points of this research is to view perceptions, experiences, and emotions of Black and White professionals within the school system. It is also an opportunity to view how the individuals involved in the placement of African American boys in special education evaluate the programs strengths and weakness.

Findings

Parental perceptions of special education and the issue of the disproportionate number of African American boys referred for behavioral issues

(Personal perceptions of special education)

All four of the African American parents were asked to share their personal perceptions of special education. Their answers very closely mirrored the data reviewed in the literature. For instance one of the parents felt that the majority of the children involved in special education were minorities. This stance is substantiated by Fremon & Hamilton (1997), Henslin (1995), Winzer(1993), (U.S. News and World Report 1994) and et al.

Two of the parents felt that special education is a closed system and should be avoided. For instance a mother stated “I agree they need special education. But it seems as though once you are in you never get out”. Another mother replied, “ It is like a dead end and there is no way out. It is not like you get special help and then your out. Once you are in that is it.” According to Gouldner (1978) a child categorized as slow in the public school system remains in lower level academic groups even if they improve. Henslin(1995) and Kunjufu (1985) also support this stance.

A parent indicated that he felt that many of the children were not placed because of learning disabilities but because of discipline problems. This parent’s position is substantiated by Foster (1986) who states that students who are often labeled by teachers as emotionally disturbed, socially maladjusted, learning disabled, or retarded were just tough street corner black or other minority youngsters.

All four of the parents interviewed indicated that they were committed to not allowing their children to be placed in special education because they wanted to avoid the stigma and the labeling associated with the program. One of the mom's stated, "No one ever says that because you are in special education you are worse off than the mainstream students. Probably there is an underlining feeling that because you are in special education you are lacking something that the other children have"

(Perceptions of the assessment process)

In addition to the parent's general perception of special education they were also asked to share their opinion of the assessment process. They primarily focused on IQ testing. According to Harry (1994), Ogbu (1986), and Santrock (1995) intelligence tests are culturally biased and not an accurate gauge of an individual's intelligence. All of the respondents were aligned with the authors noted above. However none of the respondents articulated knowledge or perceptions of the assessment process beyond IQ testing.

One of the parents asserted,

...I believe that the traditional IQ tests are culturally bias. The issue with Ebonics surfaced because they know that particular people can only associate certain things to their culture. There may be things in White culture that they can not identify with. You may show them a picture of something that White people may feel is a common household item but the child may not even have it in their house. Certain words and terms may be alien to them.

A mother indicated that she felt culture bias was a major flaw in IQ testing. Her reply to the question was,

The test is not so much IQ but how you view the culture. For instance in the case of cup and saucer if you have never used a saucer or you have never used a cup you won't know what it is. Income also has a lot to do with it. When you look at a life jacket people in the middle class know what it is because a lot of them have boats. But children that are less fortunate won't have that. So its like night and day and that doesn't mean the child is less intelligent. They just haven't come across it yet. The test don't prove anything.

One of the parents noted that assessments should encompass other realms of knowledge besides IQ. When asked if the current assessment tools accurately reflect the cognitive ability of children she responded as follows, "No I don't there has to be a lot of factors to figure out if a kid needs special education for instance their home background."

Another parent in favor of a holistic approach to the special education assessment process stated,

I think there is a lot more that needs to be considered other than IQ, A lot of the African American students have conflicting home situations. Much of the problem seems to be behavioral rather than learning disabilities. These situations seem to be made worse by their home situations rather than their ability to learn.

Parental perception of the role race plays

(Perception of racial component)

All four of the parents felt that race played a significant role in the disproportionate number of African American boys in special education. However each participant stated different examples of the racial component in relation to the problem. For instance one father replied as follows:

It plays a big role. If the school is predominantly white and you have some minorities coming to the school and the faculty is not accustomed to working with minorities they don't associate with them. Many of them just hold on to a stereotype. The stereotype is that minorities don't learn as well as whites and 'I am going to treat them that way.' They may say this subconsciously or unconsciously but they tend to not look upon them as having exceptional ability.

This parent's position is substantiated by Fremon & Hamilton (1997) who state that African American children in predominately white schools are at a greater risk for special education placement than those in inner city schools.

One of the parents stated that White American teachers did not feel comfortable disciplining African American students because of the negative historical references in this area. He responds,

Many of the teachers don't feel comfortable disciplining African American students. This is because many parents are teaching their children that whites have been oppressive in the past. Many of the teachers are young and they don't know if they have the support of the parents. For instance a young kindergartner came to school and said that, "I don't have to do what these white people say. I don't let no white folks tell me what to do." That child is going to have a problem.

A mother interviewed felt that a teacher's race does play a significant role in the disproportionate number of African males in special education her response was,

Living in the suburbs you see that many of the teachers are White, well you can tell when someone is comfortable with you and when they are not. You can tell if

they are not comfortable with you then they are not comfortable with your child.

Black males have a stereotype. Teachers feel that they have to keep them in their place.

Parental perception of the parenting influence

(Perception of parental relationship with school officials)

When the parents were asked if African American parents felt comfortable interacting with school officials (i.e. counselors, social workers, principals, psychologists, teachers, and others) they all felt that the relationship was tenuous. A father stated that he was comfortable interacting with them but he felt that the school staff couldn't relate to him. Another father felt that the attitudes of African American parents is a critical element of the strained relationship that exists between them and school officials. He relates,

Parents feel the teacher knows everything or they are no good. Sometimes we don't get close enough to the situation to know what they are doing. Once we get angry whatever happens is their fault. If you aren't learning it is their fault.

Whatever negative comes around it is the teacher's fault rather than some other reason.

(Perceptions of home profiles)

The parents were asked to share their perceptions of the home profiles of African American boys referred to special education. Henslin(1995), Kunjufu (1990, 1986) and et al suggest that the home profile generally associated with African American males at risk for poor academic performance is as follows: a single parent house hold headed by a female; absent father; employed mother in a low income position or she is the recipient

of welfare. The 4 parents adhered to the authors' general profile of the homes of African American boys referred to special education.

Although their positions were in agreement with much of the literature they had some additional insights. For instance a father stated,

I suspect an individual who lives in a home with one parent. The parent is probably struggling to survive economically and perhaps the parent doesn't take the time or have the time to pay attention to the child. So the child also may be suffering to the degree that they don't have all of the necessities. The parent may not be able to provide breakfast in the morning. So what I am saying basically is their looking at a child who has impoverished parents.

Another father stated,

Too often its a single parent. Many parents are not so concerned with rules. A lot of parents want to be their kids buddy. So the kid can do what ever he wants to do as long as it doesn't affect what I am doing. Kids are left to be on their own too much. The kids don't have anyone to give them good direction. A couple of boys that I am working with seem to speak positively about their mother but their is no mention about the father. The mother is working and stretched out. It's not a matter of one parent not being able to do the job but so many of our parents if there is only one, they are working and trying to rear the family at the same time and its an over burden. The profile is a lack of two parents to do the job or they are just letting the children drift and letting them do the things that they want to do. I'm providing food and shelter you get it yourself.

One of the mom's sighted that many of the children come from homes where they have a high level of responsibility. In some instances their areas of accountability at home exceeded their emotional level of maturity. She states as follows:

I see a lot of kids who have adult responsibilities and that also causes problems at school. They really don't have the opportunity to be a child at home. When they get to school they want that freedom to be a child . I think that is hard on kids.

(Perception of parental influence on special education placement)

When the participants were asked to describe the influence African American parents have on the issue the dominate answers related to parental responsibility, involvement, expectation, cooperation with teachers, and the educational background of the parent. For instance one mother stated,

Any parent has to be active and know their children. They have to know each child. They have to respond to the kid in that manner. Each child should be handled differently. I think parents have a great impact on their child. They should let kids know what you expect out of them. Sometimes our expectations can be too high.

Another mom reported:

The parents do have a responsibility but very often they don't know themselves. They have gotten to the place where they believe if the teacher says this then it must be true. As you get along in the system I think the parents educational background has a lot to do with it. They won't take the teachers ideas they will test them out to see if this is really good for my child.

A father also indicated the importance of parents being proactive in monitoring the academic progress and study habits of their children. He states,

I think if parents aren't involved enough to recognize what it denotes and how it is used in the system they may not feel that it is a bad thing. But since it is not set up as a transitional thing it is almost an end in it self. If they aren't setting up some requirements that will enable students to be mainstreamed it has a great affect on that child and what he tries to do. Parents should look into the child's study habits.

Very often they don't know if the child is deficient or just playing around. If you are clowning all day and not doing your work is that the reason you are behind? Or is it that you don't understand the work? The parent has to be close enough to the situation to work with the children and get help for them if they need it. A parent has a big responsibility to address the child's needs. They just can't sit back and say I'll be glad when you graduate. He may graduate but that child may not have learned anything, he was passed through. The parents have a big responsibility and impact on special education placement.

Parental perception of the role gender plays

(Perception of why boys are referred to special education at a higher rate than girls)

The parents were asked to share their perceptions of why boys are referred to special education at a higher rate than girls. The themes they noted were the aggressive nature of boys, high energy levels, and the teacher's fear of them. According to Fremon & Hamilton (1997) a teacher's reaction to the high energy levels of male students combined with racial biases may result in the teacher viewing the child as a trouble

maker. They assert that Similar behavior illustrated by white children will be dismissed while it will be taken as a more serious and chronic problem in black males.

In response to the proposed question regarding the relevance of gender on special education referrals a mother indicated that teachers feel more threatened by boys than girls. A father in agreement stated,

It just seems like that boys in particular may be more of a threat to the system, organization and school structure. The boys by nature are more bold. The girls maybe more attentive. So maybe there is a gender problem with the boys acting out their concerns and their frustrations. The girls maybe more inclined to tell you how they feel.

Another father indicates that the activity level of boys put them at greater risk of special education placement. For instance,

Boys are generally more active than girls. They are usually the most active in the class. In many cases at the lower level they don't seem to study as much as the girls. Their behavior may give the impression that they are moving slower and may need more help. The teacher may not know how to deal with them in the class setting. Special education is a means of getting them out of the class setting.

(Perceptions of teacher gender influence)

Kunjufu (1990) believes that the relationship between African American male students and white female teachers is very tenuous, and yet it is a very predominate occurrence that is going to increase as the number of African American teachers decline. The parents agreed with Kunjufu when they were asked if the gender of the teacher affects the referral rate of African American boys placed in special education. All of the

parents felt that female teachers would refer faster than a male teacher would. A mother states,

Teachers are looking for certain things that may be normal to the child and determine that the child is in need of special education. For instance if the child doesn't look them in the eye while they are speaking. Primarily it is female teachers making these assessments in the early grades.

Another mother sighted the lack of White female teacher's exposure to African American boys as an issue. Her response is ,

Yes, because you have a lot of the teachers are young females who have not had a lot of exposure to African American boys. The boys are very active and sometimes the teacher will label the kids as having a problem when there really isn't a problem.

A father believes that fear and inexperience was an issue for female teachers in relation to African American boys. He comments,

Frequently the teachers are younger and more inexperienced, They probably feel threatened more. The young female teachers would try to get the students out of their classroom more quickly, The male teachers that I've noticed in the schools may recognize a problem but they sort of laugh it off and rough house with the children, They don't feel threatened in the situation. Probably more likely the women send the kids to special ed. more quickly than the men.

Parental perception of teacher expectation

According to Henslin (1995), Irvine (1990), Santrock (1995), and et al. teacher expectation is important in relation to the achievement levels of children. It also influences class assessments. Ultimately, the expectations have an impact on student achievement and other outcomes. This indicates that teacher expectations can function as self-fulfilling prophecies (Irvine, 1990).

In response to the issue of teacher expectation the themes that the parents conveyed includes low teacher expectation combined with low parental expectation. These were cited as major contributors to the problem. One of the mother's stated the following:

A lot of the teachers will feel that maybe they should cut back on the amount of work we give that child. They don't really put them in a special ed. class but what they are really giving the child is less than what the rest of the class has and if you go along with that then your child ends up being further and further behind. I think the parents agree with the teacher. They might say go ahead and give my son less so that he can handle it. The child starts to be less motivated.

Another parent felt that the expectation for the students to adapt to the teacher's instruction style was an important point. For instance this father stated.

think that on the teaching side there seems to be more selfish teachers today. If there is a group of children performing well they tend to cater to the ones that are performing well and neglect the ones that aren't. They don't vary their teaching style to gear it to students that may not be learning at the same ability. Their rationale is that I can't extend myself to the variety and types of students and teach different ways. I have to teach them all the same way.

Parental perception of viable recommendations to resolve the issue

(Recommendations to African American Parents)

The parents were asked to convey recommendations they have for parents that might prevent their children from being placed in special education. Their answers included the following themes: challenge children to take harder courses; encourage them to read at a young age; and motivate them to learn.

In agreement with the themes listed above one of the father's indicated the importance of parents setting academic goals for their children. He articulated,

I think that parents should tell their children to take the more difficult courses so that they will be able to qualify to go to college or vocational school. They have to meet the basic requirements of the colleges. By no means should they allow their children to just take the minimum. That is why I say it so important for the parents to instill in their children 'don't just try to get by but try to excel'.

A mother stressed the importance of early childhood education and parental guidance. This mom replied,

I say you have to start young before they even start going to school. It doesn't take much to go to the library and get books. The idea is to get them started early. You can't reach them once they get into high school or junior high and expect them to want to learn. It has to be something that you more or less have to grind into their head when they are smaller to put a little more effort forward. That would help a lot of our children. Just like our children here at church are taught to do a little bit more. I think that helps the parents to have someone else telling them to do better. They have no church affiliation to help the parent.

Being involved was the key element that one of the mother's want to relate to other parents. She states,

They have to know what's going on with their child. And know where this child is learning-wise. They should express to the child their expectations. They want to keep the child in the mainstream. Test your child at home to see if they are paying attention. Children need to know that it is important to do your best so that you can keep moving.

Supporting the teacher and accepting the responsibility of the education of their children was the message a father wanted to share with parents,

You might give expectations but you should also give assistance. You can't put all of the responsibility on the teacher they have a whole class room. If you can't make a child sit down at home how do you think a teacher is going to make him sit down with a whole classroom.

(Recommendations to teachers)

When asked what recommendation she had for teachers this parent responded, I would encourage the teachers to be more aware of how they feel towards African Americans. They have to try not to let their preconceived notions influence how they treat the children. They should be willing to go the extra mile and look more closely at remedying the problem by doing something else.

One of the parents felt that teachers who refer large numbers of children to special education should be closely evaluated and scrutinized. She stated, "If a teacher is sending a lot of children to special education then maybe someone should be examining the teacher."

A mother felt that it is important that teachers and parents should be on one accord with their expectations for students. Her response to the question is, “I would tell the teacher to try and get to know the family. Find out what the parent’s expectation is for the child. Also look at your own expectation.”

A challenge rendered by a father was the following:

Be consistent. The one day don’t let every thing go and the next day don’t be overly strict. Try to get comfortable with the student. But don’t let them intimidate you. Know your students. Every body in the class is not going to achieve at the same level . But expect the individual child’s best. Think of how to help the child rather than punish him.

(Recommendations for the special education program)

When asked for recommendations for enhancements for the current special education system this parent felt that there needed to be greater emphasis on program evaluation and monitoring. He stated,

The system should be modified so that they have some quantifiable goals that would allow the children to reach acceptable standards when it comes to them learning and eventually graduating from school. I think that special education has its place but the goal should be to have the child excel so that they no longer need special education.

The response this parent offered was that special education should be a more fluid open-ended system that creates opportunities for children to be mainstreamed. Her second point in relation to recommendations for the special education program is that

educators should adopt a holistic approach. She also indicated that the negative stigma of special education needed to be addressed. She asserts,

..... to look at the total child and get the total picture of the home and the surroundings that the child is involved and then determine if special ed. is the choice or if other options are available. I would like to see the stigma erased from special education.

One of the father's stance on recommendations for special education revolved around the ideology that special education is often used as a negative reinforcer by teachers. His recommendation is, "Make it so that it is not viewed as a punishment. It should be viewed as a help. That means that the special education teacher may need to be more versatile to meet the child's needs."

**Teacher perceptions of special education and the issue of the disproportionate
number of African American boys referred for behavioral issues**

(Personal perceptions of special education)

In a comparison of the perceptions of the African American teachers and the White American teachers interviewed there were many similarities in responses that transcended across racial lines. For instance when the individuals were asked to list the top reasons for the disproportionate number of African American males in special education all of the participants (2 Black teachers and 2 White teachers) included the influence of race and culture in their answers. For instance a Black teacher states, “Societal expectations are different. When they get to school there is a subculture that they aren’t use to. Whereas at home they may have certain liberties. When they get to school they may feel confined.”

The answer of another Black teacher was in line with the above response. She states,

The schools are not designed for them. The schools are operating under an old paradigm and trying to make the boys fit into it. These young boys don’t have any transition between leaving their home, going to school and understanding the old paradigm.

A White American teacher indicated that there was a need for more African American teachers in the system because their experiential knowledge would be an advantage in advocating for Black males. When asked to share her perceptions in regards to reasons for the disproportionate number of African American males in special education she comments,

I think that there is a certain amount of racism. I think that it is scarier to handle things that you don't know about in the school system. There are less African American teachers. They would be more knowledgeable. You are more able to diffuse situations if you can identify with what is going on.

When asked to give her perception of the reason for the problem in relation to special education and African American males A White American teacher noted that expectations and values were clear elements of the problem. She states,

Expectations that teachers as well as others hold for African Americans as far as past reputations. Expectations we have for ourselves. The expectations that African Americans often have for themselves because of the history. I also think in some situations the values of African Americans.

Two of the participants felt that one of the biggest deficits in special education revolved around mainstreaming. For instance A White teacher noted the following when asked how often African American boys in special education are mainstreamed into regular classrooms. She iterates,

Probably not a lot but I am not sure that I would attribute it to race as I would to if you are an adolescent male and you are in an EBD program the chances are that you will either triculate out of it through going to another program or dropping out of school. I would have to guess that once you are in it is hard to get out.

When asked how often students were mainstreamed back into regular classroom settings 2 of the participants had experiences where African American boys were mainstreamed back into regular classrooms. However a black teacher indicated that it was her perception that the boys were rarely mainstreamed back into regular classrooms.

A White teacher noted that she has personally observed African American boys being mainstreamed.

(Perception of the assessment process)

When the interview participants were asked to share their insights on the assessment process the answers were varied. The themes in the answers included the following; assessments should be holistic, parental involvement is important, equality in the testing process is important, and the cultural aspects of IQ testing should be addressed.

In relation to the importance of viewing the child holistically in the assessment process an African American teacher stated, "Before a child is placed I think there should be a variety of tests. I like the idea of involving parents that way you get a holistic view of the child."

A White teacher felt that a variety of methods should be used. She also believed that IQ test are useful if they are administered appropriately. Her response is as follows, I would hope we wouldn't use just one method of assessment. Although some schools just require IQ testing. I think your assessment is going to be as good as the assessor. I don't know because I've seen the studies and I believe them but I am torn because I know everyone watches a certain amount of television. Everyone has some similar basis where they might not have 50 years ago. I think people should be careful of it but I think if you are doing the right thing you should be OK.

All of the participants indicated that the current assessment tools were flawed, however both of the White American teachers felt that there was no cultural bias in the

assessment process. One of them stated, "I think there are a lot of flaws in it. But I think that it treats the Black Americans equally to the whites. I don't think the tests are culturally biased."

Teacher perception of race influence

(Perception of racial component)

When asked about their perceptions of the referral rates of African boys to special education in comparison to other racial groups all of the participants indicated that they believed that blacks were referred more than other racial groups.

All of the teachers felt that race was a significant influence to the problem.

For instance a black teacher stated,

I think it plays a significant role. When groups of white kids are together it is considered a group. When groups of black kids are together they are considered a gang. That whole thing of dealing with images. People are boxed into these images as opposed to looking for someone's gifts. Its easier to deal with people in boxes. It is like training a puppy teaching them that they can't go beyond the boundary. Sometimes I have worked around people who have had no experience in working with black males.

Another African American teacher was in direct agreement with the above statement she stated as follows:

I think it plays a big part in how they are treated. Because they are active. When most teachers see that they automatically assume that the kids have special needs because of their color. They base it on their knowledge or a societal view of African American males.

A White American teacher felt that the racial component placed African American in a dual position. She felt that because of the scarcity of Blacks in the district Whites would gage them against positive and negative stereotypes. Her reply was as follows:

I think in Eden Prairie It works two-fold it works for them and against them more so than a lot of other places. Because they are fairly unique in Eden Prairie percentage wise. I think there is a certain amount of prestige because in Eden Prairie for some reason we equate it with athleticism, strengths, the images on TV. I think the prestige is there. I think it works against you because we still live with the stereotypes that we were brought up with.

According to Fremon & Hamilton (1997) and et al African American males are more likely to be reprimanded for perceived negative behavior than children from other racial and gender groups. In agreement with this stance a White American teacher relayed,

If there is a behavior and type we are bound to get on it right away. Because some people as well as I are intimidated by Black males. I am sure that is what I've gotten from society as well as growing up and seeing the movies of how they are portrayed. I think sometimes the fear of seeing that or experiencing that in the classroom may be an influence. I grew up around no African American people. I feel that I am deprived because of it.

Teacher perception of the parenting influence

All four of the teacher participants were asked to share their perceptions of the relationship between school officials and African American parents. All of the participants felt that Black parents were usually uncomfortable interacting with school officials. They also indicated that they perceived the exchanges between African American parents and school officials were usually tenuous. The themes relayed were as follows; African American parents feel intimidated around school officials; they are frustrated because of frequent negative interactions with school staff; they are defensive; and they don't have the skills to advocate for their children in a bureaucratic environment.

When an African American teacher who teaches in a predominantly Black school in Minneapolis was asked if African American parents felt comfortable interacting with school officials he responded as follows,

No. In this building they do. But for the most part I think they feel intimidated.

They may be afraid of mispronouncing a word or splitting a verb. Also no one wants to hear anything bad about their child or that they've done something wrong. Some of the parents are struggling and doing the best that they can.

This teacher also shared that he felt the philosophy of customer service which has inundated the business and other service related industries should be incorporated in educational epistemology. On this issue he relates,

The parents have to be taught that the teachers are there for them as well. Many schools haven't caught on to customer service. Parents need to relate to each other for a support system. Parents need to know that they are welcome at the

school and that they are welcome at anytime. I even give parents my home phone number so that they can call me at home if they have concerns.

The other African American teacher also felt that intimidation was a primary feeling that confronted the parents. Her answer also addressed the concern that frustration is a barrier between parents and school officials. She states,

They feel intimidated because they haven't had good experiences with the school system. And for a lot of them the system hasn't really been for African Americans. For many of the families this is in the back of their mind. They feel that education is important and they want their children to learn. But when the system doesn't recognize their child or see their child well that's when they feel as though the school doesn't care. Sometimes they feel as though it doesn't make a difference to communicate with school officials.

When a White American teacher was asked to convey her perceptions of the relationship that exists between African American parents and school officials she was in agreement with the other teachers that the interactions were usually not comfortable for the parents. She also felt that the fear level could be generalized to most parents. This teacher communicated that the parent's personal achievement level in school was a good predictor of how they will relate to school officials. She also felt that economically stable parents had fewer problems interacting with teachers and administrative staff than those from lower socio-economic status groups. She states the following:

We have the children of African American sports figures at this school I'm sure they feel comfortable interacting with officials but otherwise no. I think most people are frightened of interacting with school officials. I think that if you've

done well in school you are probably comfortable with it but if you didn't do well then you are probably not comfortable with it. There is sort of this mystique.

Another White American teacher also felt that parental societal status influenced how parents worked with school officials. According to Kunjufu (1990) the parents are a product of the school system and see no escapes for their children. In addition to the contribution of SES (socio-economic status) this teacher also felt that African American parents tended to be more defensive than white families with similar issues. She responds,

It depends if the African Americans are college graduates and there aren't any issues of abuse I think they will have that relationship. I think it would be the same with a white person. If there are a lot of problems in the family and the child is a very troubled child they'll tend to blame the school more. Whites do the same thing but I think Black Americans as I have seen it are more defensive.

(Perceptions of home profiles)

When the teachers were asked to convey their perceptions of the home profiles of African American males referred to special education the themes shared were, single parent household headed by mother, absent father, working parent(s), low income, and inconsistent home structure.

In line with the profile perceptions of the other 3 participants an African American teacher states, "Usually the home consists of a single mothers, other siblings, no other male role models in the home."

Another African American teacher stated the following in response to the question regarding the home profile of Black boys referred to special education,

Usually it is a single parent. Usually the mother carries the bulk of the weight of the responsibility of being the mother and the father. In some cases I am embarrassed to admit that we don't know what the role of the father is. Usually the father has very little say so. The mother makes most of the decisions. So with that structure in mind and little boys can be very manipulative. If they can manipulate mom let me try the female teacher.

The above teacher also shared that in some instances parents are concentrating more on supplying the children with material items as opposed to attention. He states, The mom is sometimes struggling. To have some of the basic necessities you need two incomes. And necessities can be extremely costly. Sometimes you have women who are working two and three jobs just to make ends meet. They don't have the energy to contend with a little boy. I consider it an honor to have someone putting forth that kind energy to take care of their child. But in some instances you don't need a second job to give kids expensive what-nots. Sometimes kids need structure and attention.

A white teacher from Eden Prairie related, "My stereotype would be a single parent not a lot of resources maybe not a lot of mentorship. This is the one district as a whole where EBD students as a whole have 2 parents."

Non fluid family structure is the theme that the other White participant sighted. She iterated, "Remarriage, a variety of fathers involved with the different kids, and moving. These are just the kids that I have worked with so I am no talking about everybody."

Teacher perception of gender influence

Perception of why boys are referred to special education at a higher rate than girls

When the teachers were asked to describe the gender related factors that caused boys to be referred to special education at a higher rate than girls the primary theme discussed was the higher activity level of boys. The aggressive nature of boys was also a theme communicated.

One of the African American teachers felt that due to the boys active and aggressive behaviors they were at greater risk for special education placement. She also felt that special education was a means for some teacher to remove undesirable children from their classrooms. She relayed, “.... it is a quick fix and they want to get rid of them. They say, “Put him in special ed. where his needs will be taken care of’.”

In addition to the themes listed above the difficulty many boys have in conforming to traditional classroom structure is an observation made by another African American teacher. He states,

“One reason is that schools are designed for people to sit down. Boys like to get dirty. They like to wrestle, push and run. Society treats males different than they treat females. Active stuff is for males. I have observed children on the playground. Boys wrestle and rough house while the girls sit under a tree and talk. It is socialization patterns.”

A white participant noted the following in relation to the gender influence of special education placement, “Their hyper-activity. Boys by nature are wilder and don’t take learning as seriously as girls.”

As noted by the above teachers the activity level of boys were sighted by the White participants also as a factor that could potentially place a boy at risk for special education placement. However this particular teacher also felt that there is a conflict between the learning style of most teachers and young boys. For instance she stated,

Culturally we teach them to act out I think there is a certain amount of genetics. I think most people that become teachers are the people that did well in school. Concrete sequential learners that school came easy. So you really have to practice being able to work with kids who are going to be different than you. Boys especially if they are the kind of boys that act out the hunter thing. Anyone who is a square peg in a round hole is gonna get more attention.

(Perceptions of teacher gender influence)

The participants felt that a teacher's gender had a significant impact on referrals. However it was also noted that the bias of one teacher theoretically should not be the determining factor of a referral. This is because many schools use a team approach. The team concept was articulated as follows,

Technically referral to special ed. should be done by teams. At the junior high level I don't think it would make an impact because I am not going to refer a student because the team would make the referral. The team is made up of both men and women. I think there are kids that I can't work with and I know it is because I am a female. I can change everything in the world about the way I do things but because of their background, their history, or their makeup they aren't going to work with me. I move them on to someone who can work with them.

An African American respondent indicated that she felt white female teachers were the group responsible for most of the referrals of African American boys to special education. When the question regarding teacher gender was posed to her she stated, “Yes, because I think most white female teachers refer more than any one else.”

In response to the gender related question a White teacher noted that her assumption would be that white females may feel intimidated by African American males. When the question was asked of the African American male teacher he felt that, generally boys react differently to male and female adults.

Teacher perception of viable recommendations to resolve the issue

(Recommendations to African American Parents)

In the teacher recommendations to parents the themes were diverse. They included partnership, involvement, advocacy, and support. When asked to make recommendations to African American parents that would enable them to avoid special education placement for their children an African American teacher responded,

The elders in the community need to stand up and say these children are ours. We have to reclaim our children. If we don't protect them they will get lost in the system.

He also stressed the importance of the parental role when he articulated,

Parents have impact and teachers have influence. In my head I hear the voice of my parents and not the teachers. Their instructions and morals. That is why it is important that we realize how important the role of the parents is.

Another African American teacher also felt strongly about parental involvement. However she felt the parents should receive moral support and spiritual guidance from

the church. She states, “Work with them. Send them to church. They have to find a way to train their child. They could use the church as a support system.”

In addition to supporting the child this teacher felt that it is also important for parents to support teachers and school administrators. Her feelings are,

Support kids at home with homework and also support their school. Back administration and back teachers. Set a good example at home. Make sure they value or pretend to value education. I would advise that to anyone not just African Americans.

Advocacy was a large focus in the answer presented by this White American teacher. She also stresses that parents should be visible entities in the school. She relates,

Call Pacer if you think something is wrong. Try working in the school system. Anything you can do to get your face out there. Working with the system not just advocating. If you only come in to say what a bad job the school is doing that is the way you are taken. If you are there showing that you are willing to work with the school I think you are more likely to get what you need.

(Recommendations to teachers)

The four teacher participants were asked to give teachers recommendations that would alleviate the problem of the disproportionate number of African American boys in special education. The themes they related were diverse and included: on going teacher education; teachers acquainting themselves with African American males; teachers getting to know families on a personal level; using the team approach, using

alternative strategies before making referrals; and incorporating a holistic philosophy in their conceptual framework .

The response this African American male teacher relayed was, They need to read. They need read literature like Asa Hillard, Janis Hale, Barbara Shaye. They should talk to black males and ask them what it is really like to be a black male in this society. They have to step back and want to become a student. They should be willing to learn as much as the can. They need to have the patience and the discipline. They should be willing to go that extra mile to watch that child grow. They should be nurturing. They should try to pull out the child's gifts. The other piece about education is to bring forth not necessarily to pack in. They will have to appreciate the child for who he is. We have to be open to what he likes. We also have to work towards broadening the child's view. One thing that the child doesn't know is that there are choices. Once teachers get excited about getting the kids excited and become great learners themselves the classroom will go smoothly. They have to be willing to learn. Everything that I learned in college is obsolete. Everything that I learned 10 years ago is obsolete.

Another African American participant felt that teachers should know their students and parents on a personal level. She asserts that teacher's do the following,

Go on home visits. If they are afraid to go to the home meet the family some place informally in the community. If the parents won't come to them maybe they can make an effort to go to the parent. There is more to do than just saying, "Well the family didn't come and I can't get through to them." There are 150 ways to get to a family.

A White American teacher felt it was important that teachers use a team approach when contemplating making a referral. She conveys that they should be clear in regards to the rationale for the referral. She states,

Working within a team, finding what works, and trying interventions are important. Try to figure out what you want from the referral. What is the purpose for the referral? To be able to explain that to the student and the parent first. I think teaming with consultation is the most effective.

In relation to her personal position as a special education teacher the above participant articulates, "Teachers should know that there is no magic in my room."

Clarity and consistency should be the prime directives in determining if a student should be referred to special education according to this White American teacher. She states, "Don't be too quick to refer kids. Work with the parents and the students. Know what you want to see in the present and in the future be clear about what you expect and be consistent."

(Recommendations for the special education program)

When the participants were asked to make recommendations for improving the current special education system the themes were diverse. They included: parental education; peer support; incorporating mental health interventions in IEPs; putting greater emphasis on mainstreaming; collaborating with community churches for support.

This African American participant felt that schools should work with parents in setting educational goals for their children and themselves. He also stresses the importance of parental and student peer support. He states,

We should teach people that education doesn't end with high school graduation. That schools should continue to open their doors and provide parent education. I think that could be one of the keys to having parents come and talk to each other. When they hear a professional they may take his advice. But, when I hear a peer say something it is going to have more of an impact on me rather than someone who has spent time researching it.

He also stresses the need to keep children in a regular class room setting. He continues, Kids need to be mainstreamed because they learn so much from their peers. They need to be in a classroom situation rather than a pull-out. For instance this child took a lesson that I worked on for two weeks and 45 minutes. She took my drawings and got the concept over to the class in 30 minutes. This was a child that I recommended for special education because she could not read. We talk about a partnership with the home but there is no real bond. The relationship is not as sacred as it was when I was coming up.

Research on the implications of adding mental health interventions to special education is a definite gap in the literature. However, this White American teacher stated that it would be a benefit to the school system. She relates,

I see a bigger mental health component. I would like to access mental health components in a way that is meaningful. I think that is the biggest draw back people can't afford it. I would like to see more of a wrap around approach. Kids need to incorporate community i.e. mental health, jobs, schools. Try to stay away from paper work. I know there is a necessity for it but if you have someone with a caseload of 40 kids and their spending the majority of their time doing IEPs

when they should be seeing kids. So I would have someone doing that case manager paperwork and secretarial work. I would have more resources to put kids in inclusion classes with assistance. Sometimes we don't give EBD kids what they need intellectually because we are so busy working on their behavior.

Subjectivity in the assessment process was an issue that a White American teacher wanted to see addressed. She also indicated that another improvement to the system would be to perform more observations of children before placing them in special education.

An African American teacher indicated that a critical element that was missing in the school was the message of hope and inspiration rooted in the Christian ethic. She states,

I would institute prayer back into the school system. I would also use retired professionals who were believers. I would have them not only tutor the children academically but also pray with the children when they were having problems. I just believe in the power of prayer. I believe that the power of God changes hearts and that would save a lot of our children. I have prayed for children in public school that were misbehaving. I did not receive not one complaint from the families because they wanted me to do that. Its unfortunate that the schools don't realize that Christianity is an important factor in the lives of most African Americans and most of us are not offended by prayer. Prayer has a way of calming children down.

Social Worker and Psychologist perceptions of special education and the issue of the disproportionate number of African American boys referred for behavioral issues

(Personal perceptions of the primary reasons for the disproportionate number of African American boys in special education)

When asked to render their perceptions of the primary reasons for the disproportionate number of African American males the psychologist (White American) and the 4 social workers (3 African American and 1 White American) indicated the following themes: poverty; values and cultural conflicts; racism; gender differences; and low teacher expectation.

A psychologist from the Minneapolis school district included many of the themes listed above in her response. She states,

I think it is related to the disproportionate number of African American kids in general. The number one reason is the number of poor African American families in this district. We have a high at risk population. There is a lot of conflict values between the people identifying kids for special education and the behaviors and expectations that the kids come with. There is a mix match of expectations that causes a large number of African American boys to be identified as problems or having problems. We have a lot of African American kids who do not perform well on standardized test. Right now in particular with the standards movement. There is a lot of emphasis on referring kids for help because they score low on test. That population gets referred a lot. I think also there may be a miscommunication or misunderstanding regarding the reasons for certain types of behaviors identified as problematic. That they see as more problematic among

African American boys than other populations in the district. Sometimes behaviors that really aren't problems get labeled as problems.

An African American social worker asserted that racism was a prime directive for the disproportionate number of African American boys in Special education. She feels that teachers really don't realize their own biases and prejudices. According to this social worker many White teachers shun the discussion of race. She states,

The number 1 reason is racism. The reason I say that it is racism is because I don't think the teachers really know the types of things that they are doing that are racist. They are doing these things because we don't tell them how we feel. We don't call them on racism that is the piece that is missing. We don't do it because we don't want to alienate our colleagues. But we really do need to start talking about that.

According to this African American social worker the Eurocentric culture of the schools is a primary reason for the problem at hand. He articulates,

One of the reasons that I see is that the make up of the staff the Minneapolis school district is 80 percent majority and the remaining 20% are people of color not necessarily African American. It is a very majority focused staff. Teaching a majority of African American students that is the biggest population now. You have teachers that are culturally ignorant. I think you have teachers imposing their own values on how students are suppose to act or be. They have this idea of the European paradigm of competition, you keep your emotions in, you act stoic. This is in direct contrast to African American paradigm which is to work cooperatively, talk to your neighbor, talk to the person next to you. If you have a

problem you confer with your neighbor. If you are sad you express it. If you are angry you express it. A clear example of this is if you go to a Black movie theater and a White movie theater. You are talking about total opposites. No one is going to tell you that one is better than the other. If they do I would challenge them. They both fit for the participants.

Fear and prejudice were sighted as influences to the problem by an African American social worker. She relates,

When you start talking about racism people have this fear about looking at their own prejudices. They don't want to admit that they have biases or that they have biases against children. As a teacher or a social worker we are suppose to be able to work with all students but you can't do that until you are able to look within yourself and see what your own biases are. You find a number of social workers who refuse to go to bad neighborhoods. Well that child comes from that neighborhood everyday. That is a part of your job.

A white social worker from the Eden Prairie school district indicated that her perception of the reason for the disproportionate number of African American males in special education is centered around the issue of teacher expectation for conformity of all students. She also stresses that a systems approach should be used in the assessment process. The social worker conveys,

I think it has a lot do with inconsistent expectations of the teacher. They expect them to sit quietly. The way they want them to behave does not fit into the reality or the existence of African American males. The second is the actual assessment tools that they use to qualify children for special education some of

them can be subjective. People don't think about the child in every environment. There might be some bias in the assessment tool. Like in the behavior assessment skill for children. It is given out to assess and qualify students. There might be some underlying cultural discrepancies in that tool. I am not so sure that it looks at questions that are culturally appropriate.

(personal perception of special education)

In relation to the participants perception of special education the themes were diverse. For instance they noted the following misdiagnosed behaviors, closed system, negative stigma, low teacher expectation, inappropriate setting to get needs addressed, quick fix, lumping syndrome, and inconsistently accommodating.

When asked to share his personal perceptions of special education this African American social worker stated,

As soon as there is a special education label all of the expectations drop. Kids are real good about living up or down to whatever our expectations are. If all you expect from them is to behave that is what they are going to do. You are only concerned when someone is acting out. I can't tell you how many times I've advocated for quiet kids in special education who received very little attention because they didn't bother anybody.

A concern for this African American social worker is the aspect of placing kids with minor disorders in settings with children with severe behavior disorders. She sights the following example,

If you look at Harrison which is a level 5 school. There was a level 6 school which was residential treatment. Since that is not available they warehouse kids

in level 5 schools. What ends up happening is that you have the most severe kids with the kids that are moderate and probably could be mainstreamed. But we lump these kids with kids that need mental health services.

This psychologist noted some positive aspects associated with special education in relation to African boys. She states,

African American boys probably get their needs met in special education quicker than in regular education. In fact the reason that they're being referred at such a high rate indicates that they aren't getting their needs met in some fashion. I think that kids once they are in special education tend to perform better. The kids that have severe behavior problems I don't think that they are getting their academic needs met very well. I don't think they are getting their behavior needs met.

There are other parts of special education that I am more optimistic about. For instance kids that are in special education because they are learning disabled.

Kids that are getting services for health impairments, speech and language. Kids that are in for learning disabilities do improve in their academics. Kids primarily being served for EBD and in particular the kids that are segregated because of their EBD we see that the academic returns for those kids are pretty dismal. A lot of those kids do not improve significantly in their behaviors. They stay in those programs for a long period or move from one program to another

In relation to her perception of special education this African American social worker iterated,

I think African American boys can get their needs met if there was a staff that was committed and talking to the students trying to find out what their goals are. They

do have goals eventhough we don't talk to them. The number one thing with kids is that they need to feel that they belong and that they are a part of a group. I think most of the programs are set up so the kids won't make it. They have to confirm their beliefs about the kids.

This White American social worker felt that special education has been successful in the following ways,

It has helped to identify and address behavior issues. I think they try to address them I don't think that it goes as far to be proactive or preventative. It just addresses issues and tries to open up the territory, intervene and give them more of an appropriate setting. If perhaps the behaviors were coming from an academic frustration.

(Perception of the assessment process)

When the psychologist and social workers were asked to share their personal perceptions of the assessment process the major theme was that the current system was flawed and had deficits. They also indicated that the assessment strategies are not very efficient in diagnosing behavioral disorders. The race and cultural dynamics were also discussed in relation to assessments. One social worker felt that African Americans should have more input in the development and implementation of assessment tools.

When asked if she felt the current assessment tool is a good measurement of a child's learning capacity the psychologist responded,

No, I don't think it even accurately measures the cognitive abilities of white middle class children. But as long as certain classes of special education are dependent on intelligence testing we are going to have a problem. I think we have

a problem to some extent with tools used for EBD. We have known for years that tools used measure differently for differing groups. Yet we still rely on them a great deal. An assessment is very positive if it is done in a comprehensive way and takes a lot of variables into account and isn't done to determine if this kid goes in this pile or another kid goes in that pile.

When asked if the current assessment process was a good means of determining the learning capacity of children this White American social worker feels that the esthetic environment and the expertise of the individual administering the assessment important aspects of the process. She also felt that the assessment tool was not subjective and it currently presents a holistic view of the children. She states,

....if the practitioner or the person administering the test realizes that they need to catch the kids on a good day. They need to be fed a good breakfast and other environmental elements need to be in place during the administration of these assessment tools.

When asked if she felt children were treated fairly in the assessment process she responded,

Surfacly yes because of the guidelines that are set up. Every student has to statistically qualify under those guidelines. There is not a lot of room for subjectivity "let's just get them in and make it a dumping ground" In that respect I think it is fair because the child is normed against other children their age. Not grade level or ethnicity. In hopes that none of those factors can be drawn in. They have to qualify on a percentage. My hope is that the children that were selected to represent a norm is representative of the population in general. I hope

they just didn't just use a group of Caucasian boys and use them for the norm.

There has to be interventions documented. They look at the student in many different areas. They look at the social environment, there is a parent interview, a history, and a medical piece as best as the system can it tries to look at the child as a whole and look at all of those parts.

When asked to give his perception of the current assessment tool an African American social worker responds,

I think a lot of the behaviors with EBD children are misdiagnosed. For instance undiagnosed grief especially for a young child. They may act out for a year or two because they don't know how to deal with the grief other than by being a terror in school. So this poor child is going to EBD for the rest of their life. So what happens when the child gets to the 5th grade and they've dealt with the death. Well they are no longer EBD but he is now in this setting with other kids and he wants to belong to this group. You can go up or down to the expectations of your peers.

Cultural bias was a major flaw identified by an African American social worker in relation to the current assessment tools. She states, "We still use test that are biased towards African Americans. Students need to see people who look like them doing the teaching and the testing."

In line with the position of the social worker above another African American social worker asserts, "The current assessment tool needs to be looked at. We need more representation of people of color especially males in educational positions."

Psychologist and social worker perceptions of the role race plays

(Perception of racial component)

The psychologist and social workers conveyed the following themes in relations to the influence of race in the disproportionate number of African American males in special education: cultural differences, racism, and the lack of minority representation in decision making positions.

An African American social worker responded,

If you look at what goes on in school everyone is made to act in a European way.

This way of being is totally foreign for a lot of minority kids not just African

American kids. When you add the fear aspect and zero tolerance you have some administrators going crazy. Ninety percent of our case load is African American.

This social worker also stresses the black male Vs white female paradox as being a contributor to the problem. He states, "There is also that gender breakdown reinforced by societal stuff which says black males are a threat to white females. The terms that you hear as descriptors of African American children are aggressive, mean, and dangerous."

An observation made by an African American social worker is geared towards the administrative component of public schools. She feels that the absence of African American leadership in influential policy making positions is a definite missing in the current system. She states,

Another reason for African American males being in Special Education is that even we as a people do not stand up for our students. When you look at special education blacks are not in the administrative capacity. When you look at the higher ups we are in the minority as far as making a significant change. Even the

few that are there are wimpy because they are afraid to make decisions that will go against the norm. If you go against the norm you are looked at as an outcast, you are looked at as anti-social. You are labeled as a trouble maker, friend to the kids. You are always put in a position where you have to strategize and be on the defensive.

This White American social worker felt that the race factor is extremely visible in districts with low minority enrollment. She relates that very often the kids feel isolated and have no role models to identify with. Her belief is as follows:

“The experiences that I have had with the young minority males that are qualified for EBD they are kind out of their element. Especially in districts with a low number of minority students. They can not identify with anyone. They’re kind of an island on their own. And they get this negative attention. They just don’t blend in. Or they are looking for someone to be a role model and there is just no one there. There could also be a lack of experience and lack of exposure to the norms of African Americans.

The psychologist asserted that kids who do not conform to dominant culture standards are at a greater risk of being placed in special education. She states,

I think the kids who aren’t treated fairly are those who are different from the mainstream population. They are different from what people think the mainstream population is. The largest population is not white but African American but the people who make policy are white. The way the procedures are used is not fair. I think this is true not just at the assessment level but also for screening tools that are used. The norm is set up for Caucasian children.

An African American social worker felt that the racial stereotypes applied to African American males place them at risk for special education placement. Her feelings are,

I still think that they are afraid of African American males. I think that just keeps them holding on to their beliefs that African American kids act a certain way.

They have to confirm for themselves that the stereotypes that they've heard about African American male kids are true. And they work at that over time until we point it out to them.

Social Worker and Psychologist perception of the parenting influence

(Perception of parental relationship with school officials)

All 5 of the participants were asked to share their perceptions of the relationship that exists between African American parents and school officials. The themes derived from their responses included: strained, negative, frustrating, distrustful. According to the psychologist interviewed the parents with children in EBD programs were the most difficult to encounter. She relates,

I think a lot depends on what type of programs that they are in. The families of kids in EBD programs generally have a history of being at odds with schools from way back because they were always being called because their kid was in trouble.

A lot of negative interactions have taken place because it is always around problems as opposed to around solutions. I think there are exceptions between

special ed. programs and EBD. Some of them do have good relationships with families. By the time the kid gets into the program the relationship is pretty negative. The kid has already been bounced around transferred two or more times. I think they have already gotten the message that we don't want your kid. The kid is not gonna make it. The kid has already gotten that message. It's sort of like a losing battle when they start the program. Like this is your last stop. I think a lot of the programs work really hard to try to turn that around. But a lot of it depends on the philosophy of the program. If they are still into a kind of punitive stance with the kids. If they are still into a lot of suspension. I think suspension is one of the things that drives families and school officials apart. Especially when you're talking about EBD kids. Every time I am involved with a due process hearing suspension is always one of the issues. Its what makes the parents mad. It makes the staff mad that the parent won't accept that as an alternative. Its like everybody throws up their hands and says why don't we send the kid home.

One of the African American social workers felt that Black parents did not feel comfortable interacting with school officials, Her response was, "We turn them off. Then we pact the rules with everybody around the table. Parents don't like coming to see us and they will tell you. If you can relate to the parent they will be supportive."

Developing a foundation of trust was an element that this African American social worker felt was missing between Black parents and school officials,

You have to prove yourself first. I don't know how many parents who have had nothing but closed walls, no access to staff, and by the time they get to us they are

pissed off. When you talk to them and ask them about their concerns it is just so easy to see that anger leave. You give them hope for the next situation. But if you have a bad interaction you are just making it hard for whom ever comes behind you. I can't tell you how many administration's, high schools, and middle schools have ruined it for us when we have to deal with parents. They are not going to see you as someone different until you show and prove that you are.

According to this African American social worker,

We have parents that ask us "Why should I trust you?" Its like we have to turn it around and get them to give us a chance. Its almost like a confrontation. We confront them head on and you have to be blunt sometimes. You let them know that you want a relationship with mutual trust in order to do our jobs on their child's behalf."

The social worker also commented that very often teachers don't have the skills to actively listen and communicate with parents in a positive way. She continues, "When they are confronted with an angry parent and they don't know how to cope with a problem that they might be having. The teachers react to the anger versus listening to the parent."

Dealing with parents who have a history of being mistreated by the educational community was an issue for this African American social worker. His response was,

We can not speak to what prior administrations have done. That is not us. We have dealt with parents who were just screaming their heads off and cussing and by the time you get off of the phone with them they are crying. They just can't believe that someone is listening to them. It just boggles my mind that they have

had such a frustrating relationship with an institution which historically is suppose to be an ally for us. The child generally has the same opinion of the schools that the parent does.

A White American social worker felt that the educational level of the parents and the community setting were deemed as influences to the comfort level of parental interactions with school officials. She relates,

I think that depends on the level of education of the parent, there place of residence, and if they have lived in that community for a long time. Just the demographics of the community in general . If they are in a predominantly African American community or if the teacher or administrator is of the same race I think that might attribute to a more comfortable setting.

Parental perception of the role gender plays

(Perception of gender influence on special education placement)

The themes expressed in relation to gender influence included: the high activity level of boys; aggressive nature of boys; African American male stereotypes; female teachers intimidated by males. In line with the themes noted above the psychologist felt boys were referred more than girls. She states,

Because they are so much more noticeable than girls and that is across ethnic groups. Girls are usually under-referred. There are a lot of girls who should be referred especially for academic and behavior issues. But the way they display them generally is different from the way boys do. Boys will display a little louder and more actively. Boys will ask for attention in different ways than girls do. Especially in elementary school where there are mostly female teachers. Boys

generally start school with a higher activity level whether that is biological or experiential it probably really doesn't even matter. So whatever they are doing girls will do the same thing in a smaller more contained way. Some girls slip by who have significant emotional and achievement issues. They don't get help because they don't call attention to themselves.

A White American social worker identified the aggressive male behaviors to be annoyance to some conservative teacher. Her belief is,

"...their behaviors are more covert they are more aggressive and in your face than girls. Those are the kind of behaviors that inhibit the traditional classroom teacher. They are a pain in the side Vs a female who may be withdrawn and may internalize her emotions. Those covert behaviors by boys are what the teacher notices. Perhaps a male teacher might have a higher tolerance rate for more impulsive active behaviors.

Gender bias was slated as a component of the problem by this African American social worker. She states,

I read in a book about how the classroom is set up, usually dictates who the teacher responds to. And they stated that white males are more apt to blurt out an answer and the teacher will respond positively. White females like black females are more apt to raise their hands or to have their arms crossed. Black males are normally part of the group who doesn't get recognized and when they do it is because they are acting out.

Another African American social worker feels that the stereotype of black male aggression puts them at odds with white female teachers. The social worker articulates,

“....that gender breakdown reinforced by societal stuff which says black males are a threat to white females. The terms that you hear as descriptors of African American children is aggressive, mean, dangerous.”

This African American social worker also feels that stereotypes applied to black males are an inhibitor to their interactions with White teachers. She states,

If Johnny is acting silly in the class do you think I am going to let Johnny continue to do that. No I am going to tell him Precious do you think that is what you are here for. It's time to get down to business. But the white teachers don't see it that way. They begin to talk about how he is such a headache. They never think that the same cues that one would use to get a white child to behave they will have the same effect on this African American male. They tend to see the kid as just a trouble maker. Oh he's not going to amount to anything and he just needs to be removed from here. I still think that they are afraid of African American males.

Psychologist and Social Worker perception of teacher expectation influence

(Perception of teacher expectation influence)

The themes articulated by the psychologist and 4 social workers in relation to the influence of teacher expectation were as follows: low expectation; lack of cultural competency; prejudice; and teacher bias.

An African American social worker interviewed feels that distinctions are made between the way African American boys are treated by teachers. They are not given the same level of respect and expectation in many classrooms as their white counterparts.”

The social worker iterates,

“.... it starts the minute the African American boy steps into the class room they tend to see a difference. If the kid is very out going or he stands up for what he believes in the teacher will try to break him. Low expectation is also a problem. Usually the children come from families who aren't use to really making us do what we need to do. They don't know the structure like some of the other people would. I just don't know all of the answers. But I do feel that teachers have already decided who they will be teaching to but they don't acknowledge that. The psychologist also feels that teacher expectations are a significant influence in the paradigm of African American males and special education. She states,

I think it plays a significant role. When teachers see kids who don't meet their particular expectations. Those kids get labeled as kids who are not going to do well unless they get out of the classroom and into another program. They have expectations for how kids of a certain group should act. So if I have had 3 little African American boys acting up in my classroom then I start believing that most African American boys are liable to act up. Then the teacher begins to see them act up. In contrast you see them acting more than other children eventhough their behaviors may not be any different. There are some stereotypes of how teachers view families. Whether they think families are really involved or push their kids academically. People view families as having different values depending on the ethnic group they are from. I think it plays a role on a number of different levels. Teacher expectation is also a concern for this White American social worker.

She comments,

This is coming from the perspective of a school social worker who has not come from a largely populated minority district. I think it has a lot do with inconsistent expectations of the teacher. They expect them to sit quietly. The way they want them to behave does not fit into the reality or the existence of African American males.

An African American social worker feels that teacher's allow cultural differences to become barriers to developing relationships with children. He relates, Language is a means of accessing the kid's culture. There are also other ways to access the kid's culture you can watch what they watch, listen to what they listen to, talk to them on a one-on-one level. I don't think that is being done or if it is it is only when the teachers are at the job and when they are out of here they say I am interacting with my own.

Teachers not being prepared socially or culturally to work in inner city schools is a concern for this African American social worker. She states,

The other piece is that colleges need to inform teachers that they will be doing more than just teaching. Teaching is a component that is so vast that you have to break it down to look at what are your issues. When you go in that class room and you are from a predominately white community into an inner city class room it is entirely different from what you are use to. They come so unprepared and then they set these kids up for failure. They blame it on Johnny because they are unprepared. Then they say "Well I don't know what I am going to do with Johnny." But its not Johnny! Nobody has trained you to look at your own issues

before you hit that classroom. So they come thinking that they are going to be doing such a wonderful job and the kids are going to be ready to learn. They are looking for Aunt Bea and Andy to walk through the door with Opie and everything is going to be fine.

Psychologist and Social Worker perception of viable

recommendations to resolve the issue

(Recommendations to African American Parents)

The predominate theme in relation to recommendations the group wanted to make to African American parents was parental involvement.

For instance the psychologist relates,

Get involved at their kids schools. Do it in a proactive positive way. Don't come in just when you are mad about something. You might have to make them pay attention to you. Let them know you care about how your kid is doing. That you would like to hear about anything that is not going well. You don't wait until it is a disaster. If the teacher sees something that the kid could be doing better or if there is some concern make sure that they know how to reach you. Periodically visit and ask what you can do at home if there is no class work talk about how I can help my child at home. That will build in the communication that you are the type of parent that cares about your kid and you want to work with the school and not against the school. Also know what is expected at school because it may be different from when the parent was in school.

Two African American social workers also stressed the importance of parental involvement.

A White American social worker indicated the need for parents to understand the importance of advocacy and the long term affect an inappropriate decision can have on their child. She states,

They are overwhelmed. The child's behaviors are happening across environments. Parents need to be accepting of the process. Advocate for them. Try to bring in a real systems perspective. I think a lot of time they just look at the ability to learn in the here and now.

This African American social worker's message is also centered around parental involvement. She asserts,

I think sometimes as parents of color we don't take an active role. We are so use to being called because John has acted out. A lot of parents think that this is going to be a fix. They won't be getting those calls. They won't have to come down to the school as often. Special Ed may not be the most appropriate fix. However, the teacher has a fix because the child is out of the classroom and the parent has a fix because they may not be receiving as many calls from the schools for their child's negative behavior. Sometimes when you tell a parent that the child doesn't really need special education but they need therapy. As parents we need to look for the ramifications for the future if this child is labeled special education. It is really hard for a child to get out of special ed. unless they have a dedicated team working on the case.

(Recommendations to teachers)

The major theme related by the five participants was that teachers needed to develop relationships with their student's, parents, and the support systems affiliated with their lives. This theme was conveyed by the psychologist. She iterates,

Get to know the parents of the kids in your classroom. Let them know that you are there and if they have any concerns about what is going on in the classroom the communication door is open. Teachers need to learn a lot more about how expectations vary a lot more across groups. I think teachers may need to make very explicit for African American boys and a lot of others what expectations are. Don't assume that they are going to figure it out. Don't assume that it is the same expectations that they have somewhere else. But let them know what they can do. Be consistent about those expectations. Make sure those expectations are realistic. It is OK if a kid does something this way instead of the way you thought they were going to do it. You have to be flexible about some things. You need to give kids reasonable choices. If the rules are too rigid then it is like there are no rules at all.

This social worker is also in agreement with the psychologist in regards to teachers being clear about their expectations. She challenges, "Ask yourself what are you expecting the child to learn. Also look at what are you expecting them to do if they currently aren't doing it."

An African American social worker states,

Historically the schools have been looked upon by the black community as an 'out' but right now we are the enemy and it is real sad. We've lost the wonderful

opportunity to be that ally for the family. As a social worker it is very important to get to know the family. Get to know the supports of that child because then when you need to deal with difficult issues whether its abuse or a need for counseling you are not going to be viewed upon as the enemy but you will be seen as the one person in the school that you can trust.

He also feels that cultural competency is an important tool that teachers need to adopt. He asserts,

We expect African American students, Asian students, and others, to come in here and be able to perform and act in a majority structure. The school is not going to acknowledge or be interested in what the home life is like. For majority kids home structure and school are going to match. The catch is that most of the students we teach are not majority students yet our teachers do not have the knowledge of what is in the community and what is in the culture. We are forcing everyone to be Eurocentric. If we expect the students to become BI-cultural we need to do so ourselves. If you are talking about getting a culturally competent staff how can you do that when you have people that graduated from college 20 or 30 years ago with a lot of outdated philosophy.

A missing component in the opinion of this African American social worker is the teacher's disconnection to the environment in which the children reside. She relates,

The piece that I think is missing is that in the past a lot of the staff that worked in these buildings lived in the neighborhoods. That's missing very few people live in the neighborhood in which they teach. You know it's interesting when the kids see you in the store when they are with their parents. They are so excited to see

you there. The parents got to know the staff and there was a connection. It added to the stability of the school and the children. What's missing is that staff have no connection to the community.

(Recommendations for the special education program)

When asked to make recommendations for the special education program the themes communicated were: improve teacher education in the area of cultural competency; develop relationships with parents; adopt a preventive philosophy; increase the people of color representation in employment; and adjust pay structure to reflect the level of difficulty involved in work.

In response to recommendations for the special education program the psychologist states,

Well, fortunately we are being forced to make some changes. I think I talked to you about the voluntary compliance with the department of civil rights. I think the things that they are asking us to do are the things we need to do. That is why we've been given permission to mandate them. Making sure that we really teach teachers how to deal with students from different populations and different backgrounds. But also how to make education work better for all kids. Learning different ways of teaching reading. Different ways of managing classrooms. They don't seem to be getting that in teacher education. I always felt that the newer teachers would be more skillful but that definitely isn't the case. So I think we have an awful lot of training in how to make education better for all kids And also how to be more sensitive to the different expectations and different backgrounds that kids come with. We really need to be looking at why kids get

referred in the first place and what we can offer kids at the first signs of difficulty. Rather than letting it go until they are having so much difficulty until anybody in their right mind is going to put them in special education. We are trying to give schools a structure around problem solving. So that we can solve some of those problems without putting the kid in special education. The third thing is to make some major improvements in the way we assess kids. Not just for eligibility but in earlier stages. How we can filter kids through the system until we get what should be a small handful of kids needing special education. Right now we have this big pot of kids.

An African American social worker feels that it is important for more persons of color to be hired into administrative positions. Her recommendation also stresses the need for parents to be treated with respect. She states,

More representation of people of color especially males in educational positions. I think it is real good for parents of color to see people of color in administrative positions. I think it is real important that you address that parent with respect by referring to them as Mr. or Mrs. That if you have a conversation with them make sure that it is in private and in another room. You have a small percentage of students at Harrison who are white. I would guess that it probably should be more but it is almost as if the school is reserved for students of color. As far as African American administrators there is really a low percentage. The majority of people of color are educational assistants, there are few African American teachers especially male teachers.

The above social worker also made recommendations in relation to monetary compensation for staff working with children in special education programs. She continues,

When you look at the number of kids at Harrison you are dealing with Child Protection. The severe kids are at Harrison. You end up getting new teachers at Harrison who have not had the experience and training to accommodate these student's needs. These teachers and administrators are paid in the same line as everybody else that is working in a regular class room. These people work harder than people in a regular class room and yet they are paid on the same scale. If we are trying to recruit professionals and people that have the experience then we need to upgrade those positions. We also have to make it tangible or entice people to want to go into that area. If we started paying people what they are worth in those positions then we would get highly qualified individuals to help these kids. We end up siphoning here and siphoning there.

An African American social worker also recommends that more professionals of color be hired in public schools. "Students need to see people who look like them doing the teaching and the testing."

According to this White American social worker she recommends that the program be restructured and geared towards more preventative measures. She relates,

I would keep it a lot like the early child hood paradigm. There doesn't need to be a definite label placed on the child they can just qualify cross categorically whether than just imposing a specific label. It would be more of a proactive preventative type of program instead of waiting until a child is in dire need.

Social Work Implications

(Below are the social workers' perceptions of their role in relation to special education)

I see the social workers' role as being key to how students react in school.

I think they are the ones to help the kids get focused when they do go back to their overall situations. Once I got on at Harrison I thought that we would work together to build a really great program for the kids. I thought that we could get the resources from the community to get what the kids needed. Not only for the kids but also for the parents. Those parents are crying out. They will tell you that they don't know what to do. If they are saying this to me I feel that it is my obligation to give them what it is they need to succeed with their kids. I see the social workers as the gel that hold the kids and the families together. I just believe families are key. I thought the schools would be working like that. That's what I wanted to bring a family atmosphere. I thought that they would embrace that.

Separating your personal and professional values is an important point of this social worker she believes the following

Social workers have a unique position. We are in a position to maneuver situations any way we want it because we have the contact with the staff, contact with the child and with the parent. I think a lot of times what ends up happening is that at times we abuse that role because we aren't separating our personal from our professional. We are always talking about looking at the needs of the child but yet we need to differentiate are we looking at the needs of the child or are we

looking at our personal needs. This is the way we think that it should go. Versus saying this is not the way that I would like for it to go but I am going to work within that system on behalf of that child. We tend to abuse our power. There are social workers that look at their positions and understand that they need to be respectful of that power. Be respectful of the fact that it is not just you it is families and human beings. You start looking at who you can connect them with. Once you build that plan you want to be able to remove yourself from the situation. You want the parent to be able to stand on their own two feet and advocate for their child. Even if they are in another school setting . It is important they learn the tools to do just that. Versus enabling them and maneuvering them through a system and pointing fingers at others. They've seen just what you wanted them to see and you haven't taught them anything. You want them to see what you see but you also want them to be able to see what they can do for themselves versus always relying on you to be there to advocate for them. We have a crucial role. I think sometimes we abuse it. I think that sometimes we misunderstand our position. I also think that we are misunderstood by staff too. That they don't use us as well as they could. It's sort of like we are an after thought if there is a crisis "Oh get the social worker!"

Advocacy is perceived as an important component of the position. According to this school social worker the role can be ambiguous in a school setting.

When you are in a position where you have to advocate for a student it is a real tenuous position because you have to advocate for the student which you are ethically bound to do. You also have to work with everyone in that school. If

there is a situation where someone wants a kid assessed for special education when what they really want is to get that kid out of their classroom. They're not going to come right out and say that. But you know that. If you look at the situation and you don't feel that the child belongs in special education because there are a whole bunch of cultural differences and the makeup of the district does not reflect that cultural richness or difference. If you make recommendations that are alternatives well the teacher might say I am not going to refer 'Jack,' to you because you won't get this kid out of my class room. Then you have to be careful because you get the reputation of being a trouble maker. "This person doesn't work for the school this person works for the children." You have to protect yourself because you have to do what's right but you also want to maintain those relationships with people you work with.

Chapter 5

Summary

When you are a 5 year old African American boy entering the classroom for the first time you are hoping that the classroom will be fun, that you will learn how to read books like the older kids do, that people will like you, and that the school system will understand you and protect you. However, from literature and the research exploration this author asserts that in many cases there are some major distinctions between the expectations of the school system and those of the child I have described above.

Instead of Johnny having fun, learning how to read books, fitting in, and being understood and protected by the school system the research indicates that in many instance this is not happening. The findings suggests that if Johnny is an African American boy who's home epistemology is not congruent with that of the classroom he will be at risk for special education placement. If Johnny has what the literature and the research participants of this study deem as active, aggressive male behaviors which are considered to be the societal norm for boys he will be at risk for special education placement.

In most instances if Johnny is looking for a teacher that looks like his mother to assist him in assimilating into the structure of academia he is going to be very disappointed. Mom may be ebony colored with dreadlocks while his kindergarten teacher is white with blonde hair and blue eyes. His mom talks with a distinct dialect that he understands his new teacher uses words and enunciations that are strange to him.

After a week of this mix matched existence between home and school Johnny begins to ask himself, "Why is it that some of the kids in the class are learning faster than me? Why doesn't the teacher know me?" After the four years of living in two environments are very separate, distinct and in many instances hostile towards one another Johnny says, "Why even try to make it work. I can't do it."

The scenario that was just described is indicative of how the incompatibility of the systems involved in the lives of African American boys puts them at risk for special education placement for behavioral issues. This incompatibility factor also serves as a mechanism to perpetuate the system. The literature and the research concur that the components of race and gender and how society perceives them directly impacts the educational path of children. When combined with teacher expectation and parenting issues the path can be lead to academic success or failure.

This author asserts based upon the findings that it is imperative that parents, teachers and other school professionals realize that Johnny can't do it by himself. There has to be support and collaboration between his parental system and his school environment. We can't place Johnny in an academic box for 12 years that is full of negative expectations, restraints, restrictions, and misunderstanding and then one day open the lid and say soar Johnny. Johnny is going to stay in the box because that is all he knows. He will also teach his children to stay in the box.

What can we as a society do for Johnny besides put in a box labeled emotionally behaviorally disordered because of issues relating to gender, race, parenting, and teacher expectation. The literature and the research indicates that parents, teachers and other school administrators are the gate keepers to Johnny's future.

The literature and the research participants there are more dynamics at work when most African American boys are labeled as EBD than just his observable behavior. As researchers we must be cognitive of the societal influences in relation to this paradigm.

A very important question social workers involved in the lives of African American boys should ask themselves daily is *What can I do to decrease the number of black boys being labeled EBD?*

Research Limitations

The limitations of this research involves issues surrounding reliability and generalizability. Both of these concerns are not uncommon to the philosophical arguments against the abstract and subjective data that qualitative research produces.

The conclusions drawn from qualitative research are often regarded as suggestive rather than definitive. According to Patton (1987) one of the questions raised when using a qualitative methodology is *To what extent is a human report and observation reliable?* Reliability is a limitation in relation to this project because there is always the possibility that participants might have responded differently if a different investigator posed the questions.

Generalizability is also a limitation of this study due to the personal nature of the interviews and measurements used in this research the results may not be replicated by another investigator. Another common concern about qualitative methods is the small sample size involved (such as the one used in this study) and the impossibility of generalizing research findings (Patton, 1987).

Some authors suggest that special education placement is an indicator of the life choices that will be available to many African American men (Wilson & Banks, 1994).

However, a gap in the literature exists in this area because this author could find no longitudinal studies that directly link the length of time spent in special education to specific adult life outcomes. A gap also exists in the evaluation of special education placements. Coles (1987) states that most studies of the 10 major diagnostic tests have not proved that the tests can differentiate between learning-disabled and non-learning-disabled children; the few studies that do claim to validate the tests have serious methodological flaws. Coles also asserts the child is assessed but often the special education system is not graded in relation to its effectiveness.

Another gap in the literature according to the author is in the area of holistic research in relation to African American children placed in special education programs. Coles states the following:

In general, learning disability (LD) researchers have been devoted almost exclusively to studying the products of learning; very little attention has been given to the processes that brought about those products. Seldom have the administration and results of tests been carefully evaluated vis-à-vis the learner as an entire person (Coles, 1987, p. 134).

Implications for Future Research

Despite the limitations this study has value to the social work community because it renders the insights of individuals that transcends disciplines and racial lines. It also serves as a spring board for future research based upon the themes discussed in this study. Future research should incorporate a quantitative component and a larger more diverse sample size to address the issue of generalizability. It should also devise methods that alleviate the concerns related to reliability that are found in this project.

Consideration should also be given to encourage longitudinal research in this area. The research could a picture of the African American boy placed in special education for behavioral issues from his initial elementary assessment to post secondary school employment.

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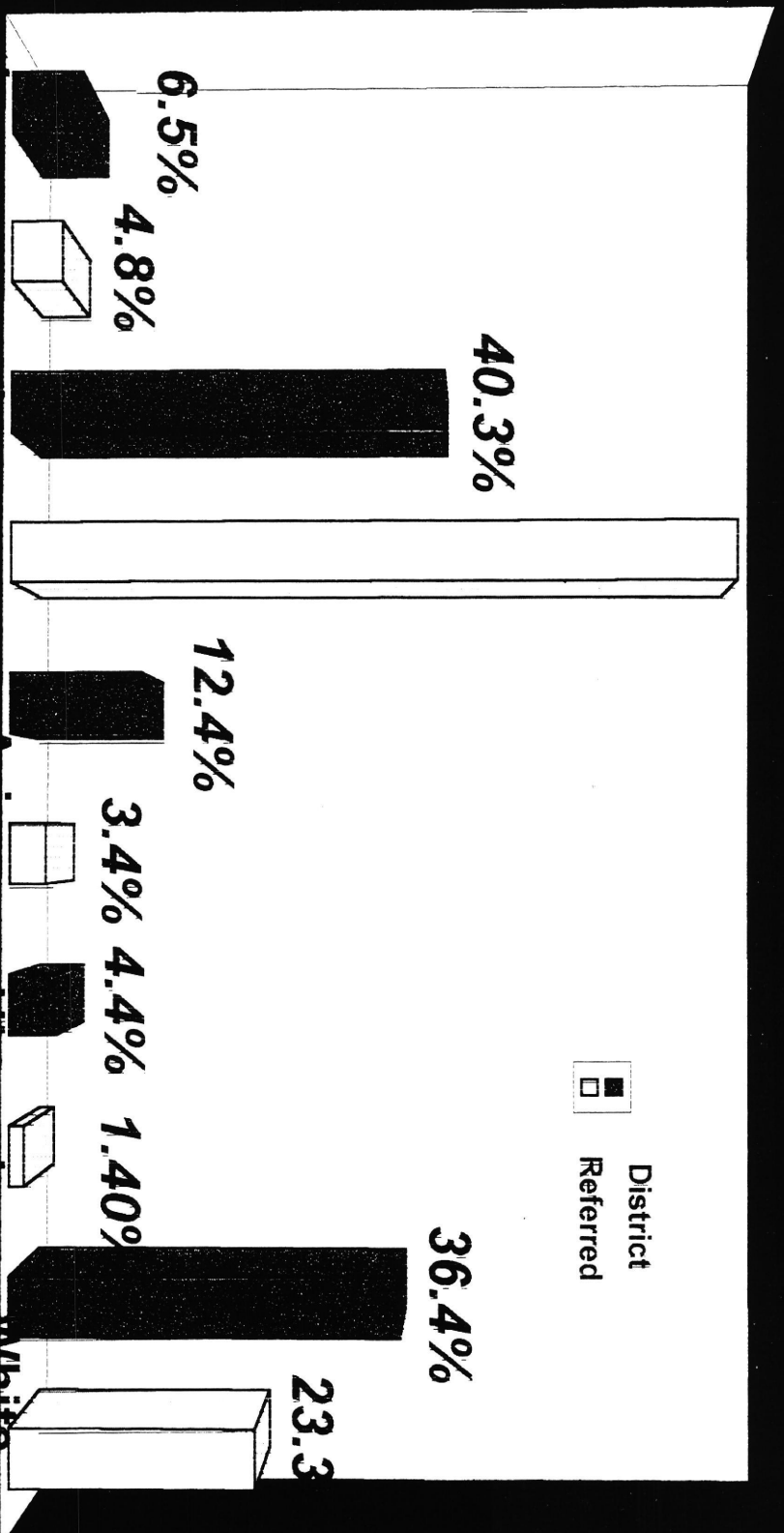
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Appendix I **Special Education Enrollment by Gender and Race** **For the School Year 1995-96**

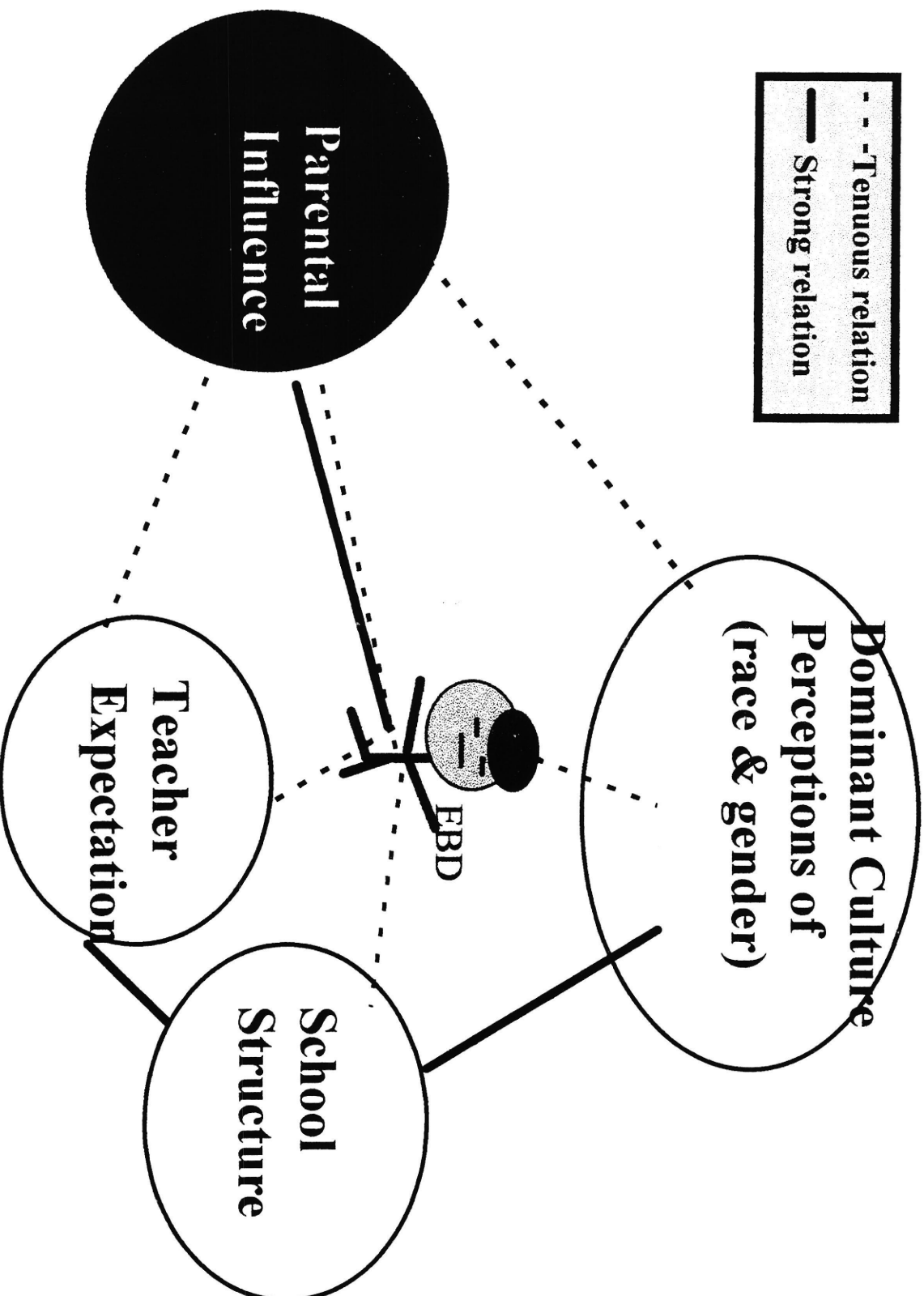
	Indian	Asian	Hispanic	Afr Amer	White	Total
Male	341	208	145	2236	1314	4244
<i>Percent of male SPED</i>	8.0%	4.9%	3.4%	52.7%	31.0%	
Percent of Male enrolled	22.9%	7.2%	13.9%	24.1%	15.6%	18.3%
Female	190	120	63	1093	606	2072
<i>Percent of female SPED</i>	9.1%	5.8%	3.0%	52.7%	29.3%	
Percent of female enrolled	12.5%	4.2%	6.4%	11.7%	7.3%	9.0%
Total Special Ed	531	328	208	3329	1920	6316
<i>Percent of total special ed</i>	8.4%	5.2%	3.3%	52.7%	30.4%	
Percent of population	17.7%	5.7%	10.3%	17.9%	11.4%	13.7%
<i>District Enroll. 10/17/95</i>	2999	5727	2029	18603	16784	46142
<i>Percent of Population</i>	6.5%	12.4%	4.4%	40.3%	36.4%	
Male Enrollment	1487	2882	1044	9286	8438	23137
Female Enrollment	1512	2845	985	9317	8346	23005

Percentage of Each Ethnic Group Represented in District and Referrals to Special Education



Appendix 3

Systemic View of African American Boys Labeled EBD



Appendix 4 Questionare

Parental Perspective of Special Education

- 1) What do you feel are the top 4 reasons for the disproportionate number of African American boys in special education?
- 2) What is your personal perception of special education?
- 3) Are African American boys able to get their educational needs met in the current special education programs?
- 4) How often are African American boys mainstreamed back into regular classroom settings?
- 5) In what ways has special education been successful?
- 6) What is the average length of time students are involved in special education?

Parental perspective in relation to race

- 7) Do African American boys involved in special education go on to college compared to other groups?
- 8) Do you see any distinctions between the frequency of referrals for African American boys in comparison to other groups?
- 9) What role do you think that race plays in how African American Boys are treated in the school system?
- 10) What role do you think race plays in the achievement level of children?
- 11) Do you think African American boys learn differently than white children?
- 12) What role does the teacher's race play in the disproportionate number of African American males in special education?
- 13) What is the home profile of African American boys referred to special education?
- 14) How do parents impact the issue?

Parental perspective on gender influence

- 15 Why do you think boys are referred to special education at a higher rate than girls?

Parental perspective on teacher role

- 16) What role does teacher expectation play in the disproportionate number of African males in special education?
- 17) What are the positive aspects of the assessment process?
- 18) What are negative aspects of the assessment process?

Recommendations made by parents

- 19) What changes would you make to improve the special education system?

Teacher Perspective

Teacher general perspective of special education

- 1) **What do you feel are the top 4 reasons for the disproportionate number of African American boys in special education?**
- 2) **What is your personal perception of special education?**
- 3) **Are African American boys able to get their educational needs met in the current special education programs?**
- 4) **How often are African American boys mainstreamed back into regular classroom settings?**
- 5) **In what ways has special education been successful?**

Teacher perspective in relation to race

- 6) **Do African American boys involved in special education go on to college compared to other groups?**
- 7) **Do you see any distinctions between the frequency of referrals for African American boys?**
- 8) **What role do you think race plays in how African American boys are treated in the school system?**
- 9) **What role do think race plays in the achievement level of children?**

Teacher perspection of the teacher role

- 10) **What role does teacher expectation play in the disproportionate number of African males in special education?**

Teacher perspective on parental role

- 11) **Do African American parents feel comfortable interacting with school officials?**
- 12) **What is the home profile of African American boys referred to special education?**
- 13) **How do parents impact the issue?**
- 14) **What adjective would you use to describe the relationship between African American parents and school administrators?**

Teacher perspective on gender influence

- 15) Why do you think boys are referred to special education at a higher rate than girls?**
- 16) Do you think the gender of a teacher impacts the referral rate of African American boys?**
- 17) What factors or behaviors do you think influence placement?**
- 18) What are the positive aspects of the assessment process?**
- 19) What are negative aspects of the assessment process?**
- 20) Do you think all students are treated fairly in the assessment process?**
- 21) What recommendations would you give to teachers that would impact the referral rate of African American boys?**
- 22) If money were not an issue how would you enhance the school system to alleviate the issue of the disproportionate number of African American males in special education?**

Social Worker and Psychologist Perspective

Social Work implications

- 1) **How are social workers involved in the special education process?**

Social Worker general perspective of special education

- 2) **What do you feel are the top 4 reasons for the disproportionate number of African American boys in special education?**
- 3) **What is your personal perspective of special education?**
- 4) **In what ways has special education been successful?**
- 5) **What is the average length of time students are involved in special education?**

Social Worker perspective in relation to race

- 6) **Do African American boys involved in special education go on to college compared to other groups?**
- 7) **Do you see any distinctions between the frequency of referrals for African American boys?**
- 8) **What role do you think that race plays in how African American Boys are treated in the school system?**
- 9) **What role do think race plays in the achievement level of children ?**
- 10) **What type of relationship does the parents of African American boys have with school officials?**

Social Worker Perception of teacher's role

- 11) **What role do you think teacher expectation plays?**
- 12) **Do you think that all students are treated fairly in the assessment process?**
- 13) **What are negative aspects of the assessment process?**

Recommendations made by Social Worker

- 14) **What changes would you make to improve the special education system?**
- 15) **What would you tell African American parents to do for their children to avoid lower level courses?**

- 16) **What recommendations would you give to teachers that would impact the referral rate of African American boys?**
- 17) **If money were not an issue how would you enhance the school system to alleviate the the problem of the disproportionate number of African American males in special education?**

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